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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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UNFILTERED

I appeal to all Hindus. Listen, these people openly say they have four wives and 19 children. I suggest Hindus should give birth to at least three to four children

—Navneet Rana, BJP leader

Right-wingers march against B'desh in Delhi

They breach barricades, clash with cops near B'desh embassy

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Hundreds of activists of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal on Tuesday broke through barricades and clashed with police near the heavily fortified Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi, protesting the lynching of a Hindu man in Bangladesh. At least 40 protesters were detained, police said.

Holding saffron flags and chanting religious slogans, the demonstrators accused Bangladeshi authorities of failing to protect minorities and demanded strong diplomatic action by India. The protest came days after Dipu Chandra Das, 25, a garment factory worker, was lynched by a mob and his body set on fire over alleged blasphemy in Baluka, Mymensingh, on 18 December.

The area around the High Commission was placed under heavy security, with seven layers of barricades, deployment of 1,500 police personnel, and the use of DTC buses to block access routes. Police managed to halt protesters nearly 800 metres from the mission, though minor scuffles broke out as demonstrators attempted to push past the cordon. Placards denouncing the Bangladesh government were raised, including one reading: "Hindu rakt ki ek ek boond ka hisaab chahiye."

Amid the unrest, India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Pranay Verma, was summoned by Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs over concerns regarding the security of Bangladeshi missions in India.

According to diplomatic sources, Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Asad Alam Siam sought assurances of enhanced protection for missions in New Delhi, Kolkata and elsewhere. This was the second summons in 10 days and at least the sixth during the tenure of Bangladesh's interim government.

Protesters demanded strict action against those responsible for the lynching, compensation and rehabilitation for affected Hindu families, and greater safeguards for minorities in Bangladesh. Several warned that the agitation would intensify if their demands were not addressed.

Police repeatedly appealed for calm as demonstrators chanted the Hanuman Chalisa and raised slogans. —PTI

VHP and Bajrang Dal members climb the barricades during a protest outside the Bangladesh High Commission over attacks on Hindus in the neighbouring country in New Delhi on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

Unnao rape: HC ends ex-BJP leader's jail term, gives bail

NEW DELHI/UNNAO, 23 DEC

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday suspended the jail term of expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar, serving life imprisonment in the 2017 Unnao rape case, noting he has already spent seven years and five months in prison.

About the victim's apprehension about danger to her life, the court said it expects that she will continue to get CRPF cover.

It added that courts cannot keep a person in custody over being apprehensive that security forces may not do their job properly.

The suspension applies only for the duration of Sengar's appeal against his December 2019 conviction. However, he will remain in jail as he is also serving a 10-year sentence in with the custodial death of the victim's father and has not been granted bail in that case.

The bench, comprising Justices Subramonium Prasad and Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar, imposed several conditions for the suspension. Sengar must furnish a personal bond of 15 lakh with three sureties of the same amount, all residents of Delhi. He must stay within the national capital, deposit his passport with the trial court, and report to the local police station every Monday at 10 am.

He is prohibited from approaching the victim's residence in Delhi or threatening her or her mother, with any violation leading to cancellation of the suspension. The Supreme Court had transferred the trial from Uttar Pradesh to Delhi in 2019, considering the victim's vulnerability and the murder of her father. Sengar had kidnapped and raped the minor in 2017, with the appeal in the custodial death case also pending.

Speaking to PTI, the survivor expressed dissatisfaction, citing concerns for her children, elderly differently-abled mother-in-law, and husband. She alleged that during the trial, her family faced repeated court summons and withdrawal of security for herself, witnesses, and legal aides, adding that the decision on Sengar's conviction took three months instead of the usual few days. —PTI

Cops say no to Vijay Hazare match at Chinnaswamy

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh said that permission has been refused to hold the Vijay Hazare Trophy match at the City's Chinnaswamy Stadium on 24 December. The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) had sought permission to hold the match without allowing spectators for now. Home Minister G. Parameshwara had constituted a committee to examine applications for permissions to hold cricket matches at the stadium. —PTI

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Mallya, Lalit joke about being fugitives in video

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

A video showing fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya partying with former IPL chairman Lalit Modi in London has triggered outrage in India. In the clip, Modi sarcastically introduces himself and Mallya as the "biggest fugitives of India," a remark widely seen as mocking the country. Modi shared the video on Instagram. Meanwhile, Bombay High Court's Chief Justice asked Vijay Mallya when he intends to return to India and told his counsel they would not hear his plea against Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. — PTI

Delhi LG writes to Kejriwal, blames him for pollution

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Tuesday wrote to former chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, accusing his government of "11 years of neglect and criminal inaction" and holding him responsible for the capital's worsening air pollution. In a 15-page letter, Saxena alleged that the AAP leadership was "unnecessarily bogging down" the 10-month-old BJP government, which he said was attempting to reverse policy failures for "petty political gains". —PTI

India airlifts 120ft bridge, installs it in Lanka district

COLOMBO, 23 DEC

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar joined Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath on Tuesday to inaugurate a 120-foot dual carriageway Bailey Bridge in Kilinochchi District. The 110-tonne bridge was flown from India and installed as part of Operation Sagar Bandhu. Earlier in the day, Jaishankar announced that India has proposed a USD 450 million comprehensive assistance package to help Sri Lanka's reconstruction efforts. — PTI

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Flames billow as houses are set on fire during protests in Assam's Karbi Anglong, on Tuesday PHOTO: ANI

Assam burns as tribals seek eviction of 'encroachers'

DIPHU/GUWAHATI, 23 DEC

Fresh violence erupted in Assam's Karbi Anglong district on Tuesday, leaving at least two people dead and at least 45 others, including 38 police personnel, injured as rival groups of protesters clashed in Kheroni market area and police resorted to lathicharge and tear gas to disperse them. Prohibitory orders were in force, yet large numbers gathered, including traders whose shops were torched a day earlier and agitators demanding eviction of alleged encroachers from tribal belt areas.

Police said tensions flared when both sides began stone pelting, injuring protesters, security personnel and journalists. As the situation spiralled, police fired tear-gas shells and carried out baton charges.

Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, who rushed to the district to review the situation, was attacked when a mob tried to block his convoy, officials said, underscoring the volatility on ground. Additional forces were deployed. —PTI

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BJP is planning to eliminatie Constitution, RaGa's tirade in Berlin

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has alleged that the BJP is proposing the "elimination of the Constitution" and vowed to build a system of opposition resistance to remove the party from power. Speaking at the Hertie School in Berlin last week, Gandhi said the ruling party had launched a full-scale assault on India's democratic institutions. In an hour-long video released by the Congress on Monday, he described Indian democracy as a global asset under threat.

"What the BJP is proposing is the elimination of equality between states, languages and religions, and the core constitutional idea that every individual has equal value," he said. Gandhi said the opposition must counter institutional capture, not merely question elections.

"We will create a method that will succeed," he said, adding that institutions had been weaponised. He alleged widespread capture of bodies such as the Election Commission, CBI and ED, and claimed enforcement agencies were used selectively. The Congress leader said institutions were failing their constitutional roles, creating an atmosphere of democratic erosion. —PTI

Rahul Gandi PHOTO: PTI

- Speaking at the Hertie School in Berlin last week, Gandhi said the ruling party had launched a full-scale assault on India's democratic institutions.

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PRIYANKA AS FUTURE PM? VADRA HINTS AT BIGGER ROLE IN CONG

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Businessman Robert Vadra on Tuesday said his wife Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has a bright future in politics, and that a time will come when people will like to see her as PM.

His remarks come amid calls within the Congress for a greater role for Priyanka, following the party's successive electoral defeats.

Vadra was responding to Congress MP Imran Masood, who recently said Priyanka could prove to be a "strong" Prime Minister in the mould of Indira Gandhi, citing the action needed in Bangladesh to protect persecuted Hindus. Masood suggested Priyanka would act decisively, like Indira Gandhi.

"I think Priyanka has learnt a lot from her grandmother, her father Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia ji and her brother Rahul," Vadra added.

Meanwhile, BJP spokesperson Shehzaad Poonawalla claimed Rahul Gandhi is rattled as colleagues increasingly reject his positions, citing Shashi Tharoor's recent remarks praising the NDA's governance in Bihar and diffusing Rahul's "vote-chori" narrative. — PTI

24 LAKH VOTERS DELETED FROM KERALA IN SIR DRAFT ROLL

T'PURAM/BHOPAL, 23 DEC

The draft voters' lists following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls have been published in Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, revealing substantial exclusions in both states.

In Kerala, Chief Electoral Officer Rathan U Kelkar announced that over 24 lakh names were removed from the rolls. The draft list includes 2,54,42,352 voters, while 24,08,503 electors were deleted during the enumeration stage. Notably, 6,49,885 represent deceased individuals, and 6,45,548 voters were deemed untraceable. "We made all efforts to trace the voters as directed by the Election Commission," Kelkar stated.

Objections to the draft list can be submitted until 22 January, with the final electoral roll due on 21 February.

Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, Chief Electoral Officer Sanjeev Kumar Jha disclosed that 42.74 lakh voters are at risk of exclusion. Of the total 5,74,06,143 electors, 5,31,31,983 submitted enumeration forms. Jha explained, "1.47 per cent were found deceased, while 5.49 per cent were either absent or had shifted." —PTI

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OUTSIDE DESIGNATED AREAS

Stopping feeding of stray dogs legal: HC

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The Bombay High Court has ruled that stopping someone from feeding stray dogs in non-designated areas does not amount to wrongful restraint or obstruction under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and quashed a criminal case against a Pune resident.

A Bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Sandesh Patil set aside proceedings against a 42-year-old man accused of preventing a woman and her friends from feeding dogs at their housing society gates.

"Stopping a person from wrongfully feeding stray dogs in a non-designated area cannot be said to restrain within the meaning of the law," the court said.

The 18 December judgment said obstructing feeding on footpaths, society entry and exit points, and school bus stops where children board or alight cannot be treated as voluntary obstruction.

The accused had informed the complainant that the spot was not a designated feeding area, relying on Supreme Court rulings and Animal Birth Control Rules mandating such locations.

The court held the act lacked criminal intent and was aimed at protecting residents, particularly children, citing previous dog bite incidents within the society.

According to the FIR, society members briefly blocked the complainant's car, while the accused said over 40 stray dogs had caused repeated safety concerns.

The High Court concluded that such intervention, in these circumstances, could not by any stretch be considered illegal or punishable under criminal law in India today. —PTI

Police bar Vijay Hazare match at Chinnaswamy

Vijay Hazare match will be held in the City's outskirts on 24 Dec

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

Bengaluru Commissioner of Police (CP) Seemanth Kumar Singh said that permission has been refused to hold the Vijay Hazare Trophy match at the City's Chinnaswamy Stadium on 24 December.

The Karnataka State Cricket Association had sought permission to hold the match without allowing spectators for now.

Home Minister G Parameshwara had constituted a committee to examine applications for permissions to hold cricket matches at the stadium. The committee visited the stadium on Monday.

Matches were stopped at the Chinnaswamy Stadium after a stampede had occurred outside it during the Royal Challengers Bengaluru's (RCB) IPL victory celebration on 4 June, in which 11 people had died.

The match will now be played at the BCCI Centre of Excellence on the outskirts of the city, near the Kempegowda International Airport, official sources said.

Matches were stopped at the Chinnaswamy Stadium after a stampede during the RCB IPL victory celebration on 4 June **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

"There may be some confusion among you (media) on whether permission has been granted to hold a cricket match or not (at the Chinnaswamy stadium). As you are aware, our committee went there on Monday. Based on the committee's recommendation, permission has been refused," Singh told reporters on Tuesday.

"The committee had gone to the stadium yesterday as per the instructions of the Home Department. As per their report, permission has not been granted for the match tomorrow," he said.

Singh refused to share details of the report, stating that he is one of the members of the committee.

- The match will now be played at the BCCI Centre of Excellence on the outskirts of the city, near the Kempegowda International Airport, official sources said

The committee, headed by the Greater Bengaluru Authority commissioner, consisted of the Commissioner of Police and officials of the PWD, Fire and Health departments and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM).

Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said the committee would be submitting a report to the government. The Home Minister had held a meeting with the KSCA and police officers at the Vidhana Soudha on Monday, regarding holding cricket matches at the stadium, and had asked the panel to visit the facility. *—PTI*

PROBE STILL ON

BJP's Byrathi not named in rowdy's murder chargesheet

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

The Karnataka CID's SIT has filed a chargesheet in a city court here on Monday pertains to the July 15 killing of VG Shivaprakash alias Biklu Shiva, 40, and comes days after the Karnataka High Court set aside the invocation of the Karnataka Control of Organised Crime Act (KCOCA) in the matter.

Shiva was hacked to death at Bharathi Nagar in the city. Investigators said the murder was triggered by a long-simmering property dispute dating back to February 2025 in the Kithaganur area.

The FIR had named BJP MLA Basavaraj as accused number five, while gangster Jagadish Padmanabha alias Jaga, 45, was listed as the prime accused.

Jaga's alleged associates — Vimal Raj, Kiran Krishna, Madan K and Pradeep K — were also listed as accused. However, the MLA has not been named in the chargesheet, with the SIT stating that the investigation against him is going on.

On 16 July, a day after the murder, five men — Kiran Krishna, Pradeep, Vimal Raj, Madan K and Samuel Victor — surrendered before the police, claiming to have taken part in the crime.

The investigation was later transferred to the CID's SIT due to the seriousness of the allegations. Police said the conspiracy took shape after a property claimant named Ravi alleged that Shiva had illegally built a wall around the four sites. *—PTI*

Lokayukta raids 4 govt officers, seize Rs 19 crore assets

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

The sleuths of Lokayukta on Tuesday carried out coordinated raids against four government officers accused of amassing wealth disproportionate to their known sources of income, an official said

The raids started early in the morning at 17 places linked to these officers, a Lokayukta officer said.

During the search, the Lokayukta sleuths unearthed Rs 19.2 crore worth assets of the accused officers.

A zilla parishad assistant secretary in Bagalkote and an Assistant Executive Engineer, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Raichur were among the officials raided by Lokayukta.

One of them was found possessing wealth worth Rs 9.89 crore.

The Lokayukta sleuths searched his four locations and found that he owned seven plots (sites), four houses, a commercial complex, which are worth Rs 9.17 crore.

He had cash Rs 2.02 lakh, Rs 8.22 lakh worth ornaments and Rs 62 lakh worth vehicles.

The value of a woman official's assets was estimated at Rs 4.09 crore. *—PTI*

Delhi trip not about power tussle: DKS

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said his Delhi visit was solely to discuss state issues with Union ministers, dismissing speculation over a rotational chief ministership. "I have not come here for any politics. I have come only to meet Union ministers regarding irrigation and urban development," he said, adding he would not comment on issues "not on the cards".

Shivakumar met Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal and Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil, seeking approvals for pending projects, including Phase 3A of the Bengaluru Metro. He said clearance is awaited for the revised Phase 2 cost, escalated from Rs 26,405.14 crore to Rs 40,425.02 crore. Phase 3A, a 36.59-km Sarjapura–Hebbal corridor with 28 stations costing Rs 28,405 crore, submitted in January, remains pending. Proposals for a Regional Rapid Transit System and legacy leachate treatment at Mittaganahalli were also raised.

Separately, Dy CM Shivakumar criticised the Centre's Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, calling it "the beginning of the end" and warning that the 40 per cent state funding requirement would make it unworkable." *— ANI*

Gandhi's soul chanted Ram's name: Bommai on Cong stir call

BIDAR, 23 DEC

Former chief minister and BJP MP Basavaraj Bommai on Tuesday strongly defended the Centre's decision to rename the employment guarantee scheme as 'VB G Ram G', saying there was no contradiction between Mahatma Gandhi and the idea of Ram.

"Ram is no different; Mahatma Gandhi is no different. Gandhi's soul chanted Ram's name, and he spoke of Ram Rajya as village self-rule. It is this idea that has inspired the naming of the scheme," Bommai told reporters at the Bidar airport, responding to the Congress' call for nationwide protests.

Bommai alleged that the Congress had "killed Gandhi ideologically many times". He claimed the first betrayal was refusing to dissolve the Congress as Gandhi had suggested, followed by the imposition of the Emergency, which he said violated Gandhi's commitment to democracy and the Constitution. He accused the Congress of using Gandhi's name for political gain, claiming that only the Gandhi family benefited from it.

Former chief minister BJP MP Basavaraj Bommai interacts with media at Bidar airport on Tuesday **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Dismissing Congress criticism as political, Bommai said reforms under the Modi government had strengthened the scheme. He added that annual spending had risen from RS 33,000 crore under the Congress to Rs 1.11 lakh crore now.

While the Centre bears the cost of 100 days' wages, he accused the state government of hesitating to pay wages for the additional 25 days. Bommai also mocked the Congress "high command", saying it was split and paralysed by infighting, affecting governance. "Farmers are suffering," he said. *—Salar News*

BENGALURU CRIME FILES

WOMAN POSING AS RELATIVE STEALS GOLD AT WEDDINGS

City CP Seemanth Kumar Singh takes a look at the currencies and valuables, in Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

A woman was arrested for allegedly stealing gold jewellery and cash by posing as a relative and attending weddings at marriage halls here, police said on Tuesday. With her arrest, police said they recovered 262grams of gold jewellery worth Rs 32 lakh.

According to police, a resident of Manjunatha Nagar said she, along with her mother, had gone to a marriage hall in Basavanagudi on 23 November to attend a relative's wedding.

They kept a bag containing a 32-gram gold chain and an artificial collar chain in one of the rooms there.After the function, they returned home and found the gold chain, worth about Rs 3 lakh, missing, police said."During probe, we apprehended a woman from her Udayanagar, KR Puram, residence on 1 December," a police officer said. During questioning, she confessed to thefts in two other cases and admitted stealing jewellery from marriage halls in other districts. *—PTI*

FOREIGN NAT'L FERRYING COCAINE FROM MUMBAI TO B'LURU HELD

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

A foreign woman was arrested for allegedly transporting 121 grams of cocaine worth Rs 1.20 crore from Mumbai to Bengaluru by concealing it in bread covers while travelling on private buses, police said Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the CCB Narcotics Control Wing raided her residence within Varthur police limits and seized the drug and a phone used to coordinate deliveries. Police said she entered India on a 2024 student visa but never enrolled, sourcing cocaine in Mumbai alone. *—PTI*

Passport fraud: Cop held for forged verification

MANGALURU, 23 DEC

A police officer was arrested for allegedly forging verification records to facilitate issuance of a passport in Dakshina Kannada district, police said on Tuesday.

The case surfaced after discrepancies were found in the passport application of local resident Shakti Das, first submitted in February 2025.

The application was flagged over an address mismatch. When Das reapplied in June, investigators found that PI Pradeep forged a verification report in a beat officer's name to bypass checks. The fraud came to light during a document review on December 19, which also indicated attempts to destroy evidence.

A case was registered at Vitla police station against Pradeep and Das for forgery offences. *—PTI*

HDK bats for B'luru to Goa Vande Bharat via coastal K'taka

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

Union Heavy Industries and Steel Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Tuesday urged Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to consider introducing a Vande Bharat Express service between Bengaluru and Madgaon in Goa via coastal Karnataka.

He cited the long-pending public demand and improved operational readiness of the route.

In a letter to Vaishnaw, Kumaraswamy said the proposed high-speed service would significantly enhance rail connectivity between the state capital and the coastal belt of Karnataka and Goa, especially in the wake of the successful electrification of the ghat section.

- He noted that the corridor linking B'luru with Hassan, Mangaluru Junction, and Karwar caters to a wide and diverse passenger base, including tourists, pilgrims and students

He noted that the corridor linking Bengaluru with Hassan, Mangaluru Junction, Udupi and Karwar caters to a wide and diverse passenger base, including tourists, pilgrims, students and professionals.

"I would like to draw your kind attention to a long-standing and widely shared public aspiration for improved high-speed rail connectivity between Bengaluru and the coastal belt of Karnataka and Goa. With the successful completion of electrification across the ghat section, the route is now operationally well-positioned for the introduction of a Vande Bharat Express service," Kumaraswamy said in the letter.

Kumaraswamy further requested the Railway Minister to direct the South Western Railway to examine the feasibility of the proposed service and initiate appropriate action. *—PTI*

First cruise of 2025-26 season docks at Mangalore Port

MANGALURU, 23 DEC

The 2025–26 cruise season at New Mangalore Port began with the arrival of the luxury cruise vessel MS Seven Seas Navigator, port authority officials said.

The Bahamas-flagged ship arrived from Mormugao Port at 6.15 am on December 22 and was berthed at Berth No. 4 by 7.15am. The vessel measures 172.5m in length, has a draft of 7.5m, and a gross registered tonnage of 28,803. It carried 450 international passengers and 360 crew members, according to a press statement.

The New Mangalore Port Authority (NMPA) extended a grand welcome to the tourists, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of coastal Karnataka. Arrangements were made in coordination with Customs, Immigration, tourism agencies and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth and pleasant experience for visitors. *—PTI*

Forest Minister orders capture of tigress, cubs seen in Chamarajanagar

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre on Tuesday directed officials to immediately install cages and, if necessary, tranquillise and capture a tigress and her four cubs spotted in Chamarajanagar district, with the aim of relocating them safely to a secure habitat.

Chairing an emergency video conference, Khandre said the presence of the five tigers on private agricultural lands in Nanjedevanapura village had caused panic among locals. He stressed swift and scientific action to protect human life while preventing harm to the animals.

"The safety of human lives is paramount, and the protection of wildlife is equally important," he said, emphasising a careful balance between public safety and conservation. Officials were instructed to deploy drones and thermal cameras to track the tigers' movements and to alert villagers if the animals approached human settlements. Khandre cautioned against past incidents, including the Badagalapura rescue attack, and ordered all precautions to ensure the safety of rescue teams, including additional veterinarians, sharpshooters, and elephants if necessary.

Preventive measures, including Section 144, were to be strictly enforced to keep the public away. The minister clarified the measures were temporary and instructed officials to consult experts for a long-term strategy to prevent wildlife from straying into human habitats.

Officials also reported that a leopard involved in a fatal attack in Turuvekere had been captured and relocated. *—PTI*

400+ SCREENINGS, 200 FILMS

Bengaluru to host Int'l Film Festival from 29 Jan

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

Bengaluru will host the 17th Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFES) from 29 January to 6 February, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced on Tuesday.

The Chief Minister said he will inaugurate the festival at a special event on the grand steps of the Vidhana Soudha, while senior actor, director and producer Prakash Raj has been appointed as the festival's ambassador. The theme for this year's edition is likely to focus on women's empowerment, though a final decision is yet to be taken.

Films will be screened primarily at 11 Cinepolis screens at Lulu Mall, Rajajinagar, along with venues at Dr Rajkumar Bhavan, Artists' Association, Chamarajpet, and Suchitra Film Society in Banashankari.

CM Siddaramaiah with Chalana Chitra Academy President Sadhu Kokila and others during a meeting on the 17th International Film Festival Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTO: SALAR PHOTO**

- The festival will feature more than 400 screenings of around 200 films from over 60 countries, including Kannada and other Indian productions. Many of the films have been showcased at major international festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, will also be screened

Siddaramaiah said applications for competition sections in Asian, Indian and Kannada cinema have received a strong response, with over 110 films submitted so far. The last date for entries is 31 December.

The festival will feature more than 400 screenings of around 200 films from over 60 countries, including Kannada and other Indian productions. Many of the films have been showcased at major international festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, Rotterdam, Busan and Toronto, and several award-winning and Oscar-shortlisted films will also be screened.

A special segment showcasing the history of African cinema will be presented in collaboration with Alliance Française Bangalore and the French Institute in India.

The State government has allocated 7 crore for the festival. Awards, including the Lifetime Achievement Award, will be presented at the closing ceremony. *—PTI*

QUOTE of THE DAY

About 12 crore people living in rural areas of India will not get guaranteed work under the new VB-G RAM G Act.

—ABHISHEK DUTT,
Congress spokesperson

RaGa family & party have no confidence in him: BJP

BJP takes a dig at RaGa's 'elimination of Constitution' remarks

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The BJP slammed Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday over his remarks in Berlin, alleging that the Congress leader speaks against India and defames the country on foreign soil because he is "rattled" by the fact that his party colleagues and even family members are showing "no confidence" in him.

Gandhi has lost people's confidence and it is apparent with the Congress losing 95 elections under his leadership, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla told a press conference at the party headquarters here.

The BJP came down heavily on Gandhi after the he alleged that the ruling party is proposing the "elimination of the Constitution" that grants equal rights to every citizen

Rahul Gandhi; Shehzad Poonawalla *PHOTO: PTI*

and vowed to create a system of opposition resistance that will succeed in removing it from power.

Speaking at the Hertie School in Berlin last week, Gandhi said, "What the BJP is proposing essentially is the elimination of the Constitution. Elimination of the idea of equality between states, elimination of the idea of equality between languages and religions, elimination of the idea of the central core of the Constitution, which is that every individual will have the same value."

In an hour-long video released by the Congress on Monday, Gandhi said India's largest and complex democracy is a global asset, and the "assault" on the Indian democratic system is an attack on the global democratic system.

Hitting back at him, Poonawalla said, "Rahul Gandhi is facing no confidence from people. His partners in the INDIA bloc, his own party leaders and even his family members are passing a no-confidence motion against him one after another."

"Hence, he embarked on a foreign trip once again, while remaining committed to (American investor) George Soros, to vent his ire against BJP and India. Rahul Gandhi, once again in opposition to Modi and the people's mandate, started opposing India in Berlin," he alleged. *—PTI*

EAM S Jaishankar with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath, Health Minister Nalinda Jayatissa, Labour Minister Anil Jayantha & Dy Tourism Minister Ruwan Ranasinghe, in Colombo *PHOTO: PTI*

India announces $450 million relief package for Lanka

COLOMBO, 23 DEC

India announced a reconstruction package of USD 450 million to Cyclone Ditwah-hit Sri Lanka, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met the nation's top leaders and assured Delhi's steadfast commitment to Colombo's rebuilding post-cyclone.

Jaishankar, who arrived here as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Special Envoy, said that it was natural for India to help at a time when Sri Lanka faced a crisis.

He called President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and conveyed Modi's warm wishes.

"The letter from Modi that I handed over commits a reconstruction package of USD 450 million to Lanka," Jaishankar said while addressing the press alongside Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath.

Jaishankar said he had a discussion with the President on the damage caused by Cyclone Ditwah and their talks centred around how expeditiously India's assistance package can be delivered.

"The assistance package that we have proposed is worth USD 450 million. It will include USD 350 million in concessional Lines of Credit and USD 100 million of grants," he said.

He said that the assistance will cover sectors worst affected by the cyclone, including rehabilitation and restoration of road, railway and bridge connectivity; support for the construction of damaged houses, support for health and education systems, agriculture, and working towards better disaster response and preparedness. Jaishankar and his counterpart Herath jointly inaugurated a 120-foot dual carriageway Bailey Bridge in the Kilinochchi District of Northern Province in the presence of President Dissanayake. *—PTI*

Worker unions to protest against new bills in Feb

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

A joint platform of central trade unions (CTUs) has decided to hold a country-wide General Strike, tentatively scheduled for 12 February 2026, against recent legislative changes related to workers, the nuclear energy sector, and rural jobs. CTUs are opposing: four new labour codes, SHANTI Bill and the G RAM G Bill. In a statement on Tuesday, the joint platform of 10 central trade unions (CTUs) described these changes as a multi-pronged attack by the central government on people's rights. The strike date will be confirmed at the National Workers' Convention on 9 January in New Delhi. *—PTI*

22 Maoists surrender with arms in Odisha

MALKANGIRI, 23 DEC

Twenty-two Maoists on Tuesday surrendered before police in Odisha's Malkangiri district, an officer said. The Maoists handed over nine firearms and 150 live rounds of ammunition, 20kg of explosives, 13 IEDs, gelatin sticks, and other articles in the presence of Odisha DGP YB Khurania and other senior officers here. The surrendered are mostly hail from neighbouring Chhattisgarh, officer said. The surrendered include Divisional Committee Member Linge Myre Madkam of Sukma & Baman Madkam, an area committee member, from Dantewada in Chhattisgarh. *—PTI*

Haryana increases working hours for shop employees

CHANDIGARH, 23 DEC

The Haryana Assembly on Monday passed the Haryana Shops and Commercial Establishments (Amendment) Bill, 2025, increasing the maximum daily work limit for employees of shops and private commercial establishments from nine to 10 hours while maintaining a 48-hour weekly cap. Passed on the final day of the Winter Session, the legislation also tripled the quarterly overtime limit to 156 hours and extended continuous work periods to six hours, a move Labour Minister Anil Vij defended as essential for economic growth and "ease of doing business." However, the bill sparked a sharp backlash from Congress MLA Aditya Surjewala, who denounced the measures as "modern-day slavery" after his amendment to retain original nine-hour limit was rejected by vote. *—PTI*

Trump repeats claim of averting India-Pak war

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

US President Donald Trump has repeated his claim of resolving the India-Pakistan conflict, asserting that Islamabad's leadership credited him for saving millions of lives. Speaking from his Mar-a-Lago residence on Monday, Trump claimed that Washington had mediated a full and immediate ceasefire between India and Pakistan after a long night of talks, asserting that the intervention averted a potential nuclear conflict. India launched Operation Sindoor on 7 May in retaliation for 22 April Pahalgam attack. Trump has repeated his claims over 60 times. *—PTI*

32L unmapped WB voters called for SIR hearing

KOLKATA, 23 DEC

Around 32 lakh unmapped voters will be called in the first phase of hearings under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls, officials said.

Hearings for this category, in which voters could not link their names with those of family members in the 2002 electoral rolls, will begin from 27 December, he said.

"We have started sending notices to around 10 lakh such voters from today, while the same will be issued to another 22 lakh voters from Tuesday,"

PHOTO: PTI

the official at the office of the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer told PTI.

During the enumeration phase, a total of 31,68,424 unmapped voters were identified across the state, he said.

He said that the proceedings will be conducted at district magistrates' offices, sub-divisional offices, various government departments, as well as in schools and colleges.

Voters with logical discrepancies will be taken up in the next phase, for which guidelines have been sought from the EC, another official said. Each hearing will be conducted under the supervision of a micro-observer, he said.

Training for 4,000 micro-observers will be held in two phases on 24 December in Kolkata, he said, noting that all the micro-observers are officials from the state. *—PTI*

Shashi Tharoor praises Jaishankar & MEA for contributions to nation

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Congress leader **Shashi Tharoor** lauded External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his ministry on Tuesday for setting up the Nalanda University campus in Bihar and many other unsung contributions to the country.

"...I was hugely impressed by the Nalanda University campus while attending the @nalandalitlive. My warm congratulations to @DrSJaishankar and @IndianDiplomacy for this wonderful achievement, which deserves a higher rating among the many unsung contributions of MEA to our nation," Tharoor said in a post on X.

The former Union minister was in the Nalanda University for a literature festival being organised there.

"I came to Bihar to witness its culture, not to fulfil any political agenda. I encourage others to explore the Bihar Museum and the Bapu Tower," Tharoor told reporters in Patna.

Tharoor has often lauded the Narendra Modi government and made remarks that are at variance with his party's and its leadership's views.

On Monday, the MP from

- Tharoor has often lauded the Narendra Modi government and made remarks that are at variance with his party's and its leadership's views. He welcomed the revival of the Nalanda University as a symbol of India's civilisational legacy.

Kerala's Thiruvanan thapuram said, "India no longer hosts any of the world's leading universities.... While a few universities have now entered the top 200, none figure among the top 10 or even the top 50 worldwide."

He welcomed the revival of the Nalanda University as a symbol of India's civilisational legacy. *—PTI*

'Sena-MNS alliance announcement likely on today'

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The long-awaited announcement of an alliance between the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) for the 15 January civic elections in Mumbai could take place on Wednesday, Sena leader Sanjay Raut said.

"There will be a press conference (by Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and MNS president Raj Thackeray)," the Rajya Sabha MP said here, without providing more details.

Earlier in the day, he shared a picture of the two cousins with the caption "tomorrow at 12pm".

Alliance talks between the two parties for the crucial Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections have been going on for quite some time.

Raut also told reporters that besides the BMC, the two parties are in talks for tie-ups in Thane, Navi Mumbai, Kalyan-Dombivli, Mira Bhayander, Nashik and Pune municipal corporations. Local units have already concluded talks in the civic bodies other than Mumbai, he added.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) and MNS will contest together in Pune, and talks were underway with the Congress in Nashik, Pune and Mira Bhayander, he said. *—PTI*

Union Minister Piyush Goyal with AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and others in Chennai, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

2026 polls: AIADMK, BJP begin talks

CHENNAI, 23 DEC

NDA alliance parties in Tamil Nadu the AIADMK and the BJP on Tuesday initiated preliminary talks ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls in the state, with saffron party leader Piyush Goyal holding talks with AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami here.

Speaking to reporters after the discussions, Goyal said he discussed with Palaniswami the plans for the coming months to prepare for the polls, due by March-April 2026.

- The AIADMK General Secretary Palaniswami said Tuesday's talks focused on working out strategies to "defeat the anti-people DMK government" in the state.

Goyal said: "We had good discussions about strengthening our political work together and fighting the 2026 Assembly election together as the NDA family under the leadership and guidance of PM Modi."

Exuding confidence that the NDA will have a "sweeping victory" in next year's poll, the Union Commerce minister added that the NDA partners would strive to meet the aspirations of the people, especially their demand for progress.

The AIADMK General Secretary Palaniswami said Tuesday's talks focused on working out strategies to "defeat the anti-people DMK government" in the state.

Meanwhile, the BJP Tamil Nadu chief stated that the discussions did not revolve around seat-sharing. *—PTI*

FAMILY TO GET RS 5 LAKH

2 more held in Kerala mob lynching

PALAKKAD/KOLKATA, 23 DEC

Two more persons were arrested in connection with the alleged mob lynching in which a Chhattisgarh native was killed at Kizhakeattappallam near Walayar here, police on Tuesday said.

According to the police, the arrested persons were identified as Vinod and Jagadish of Attappallam, who were allegedly part of the mob that attacked Ramnarayan, 31, suspecting him to be a thief on 17 December.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed to probe the case has identified eight more persons involved in the incident, who are currently absconding, said police adding that additional charges would be invoked in the case.

They said provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act would also be added after knowing details of the deceased's social status.

Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai; Lynching victim Ram Narayan *PHOTO: PTI/SCREENGRAB*

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai has announced an assistance of Rs 5 lakh for the family of a migrant worker from the state who was killed in a mob lynching incident in Kerala.

He urged the Kerala government to ensure the strictest legal action against those involved in this heinous crime.

MURSHIDABAD FATHER-SON LYNCHING

A court in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Tuesday sentenced 13 people to life imprisonment for the lynching of a man and his son during the protests over the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

Special public prosecutor Bivas Chatterjee said this is the country's second conviction in a mob lynching case and first in West Bengal.

The fast-track court in Jangipur directed the state to give Rs 15 lakh compensation to the family of the victims.

Haragobinda Das, 72, and his son Chandan Das, 42, were killed by a mob at their house in Jafrabad in the Samserganj police station area on 12 April.

Chatterjee said the prosecution had prayed for capital punishment for the convicts, maintaining that the crime falls in the rarest of rare category. He said the state government will decide whether it will appeal against the judgment before the Calcutta High Court. The court had convicted these 13 accused on Monday. Each of the 13 convicts was also sentenced to 10 years in prison for dacoity, 10 years of imprisonment for house trespass and a five-year term for rioting.

All the sentences will run concurrently, the court said.

Violent protests rocked Murshidabad district from 8 to 12 April, after the Waqf (Amendment) Act was passed in Parliament. Central forces had to be deployed to control the situation. *—PTI*

Chaitanya Baghel *PHOTO: PTI*

Chaitanya Baghel got ₹250 cr in Chh'garh liquor scam: ACB

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The Anti-Corruption Bureau/ Economic Offence Wing (ACB/EOW) has claimed that Chaitanya Baghel, son of former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, received between Rs 200 crore and Rs 250 crore as his share from the alleged multi-crore operation. The ACB/EOW's supplementary chargesheet, which spans approximately 3,800 pages, alleges that Chaitanya coordinated and protected an extortion racket within the state's excise department during the Congress government from 2018 to 2023.

The chargesheet names Chaitanya as an accused in a scam estimated to exceed Rs 3,500 crore, with claims that he facilitated the transfer and management of funds collected by a liquor businessman's team through banking channels. Notably, the probe suggests that Chaitanya "received around Rs 200 crore-Rs 250 crore as his share."

Chaitanya was arrested on 18 July and is currently in custody. Bhupesh Baghel has accused the probe as a politically motivated attempt to target opposition leaders. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Jawan dies as raft capsises during training in Sikkim

GANGTOK, 23 DEC

An Army jawan on Monday died after a raft capsised in the Teesta river in Sikkim's Pakyong district, police said. The accident occurred during an annual rafting training programme for soldiers when a raft struck a damaged structure of a bridge and capsised in the river, and the jawan was swept away, a senior officer said. An operation was immediately launched by the Army along with a team from Teesta Rescue Centre, he added. The body was recovered from the downstream of the river at Tar Khola under the Kalimpong of West Bengal, and was sent for post-mortem examination, the officer said, adding that the deceased was identified as Lance Naik Rajasekhar of the 191 Artillery Regiment. *—PTI*

2 killed, 16 hurt as six vehicles collide amid fog in UP

AMETHI, 23 DEC

Two people were killed and 16 others injured after six vehicles collided on a highway in UP's Amethi district amid dense fog in the early hours of Tuesday, police said. The incident took place around 2.30am near an under-bridge in the Musafirkhana police station area. SHO Vivek Singh said the accident occurred near the Amethi-Sultanpur turn when a truck hit the roadside railing due to poor visibility caused by fog. He said three other trucks, a car and a bus coming from behind collided with each other. The SHO said two truck drivers Manjeet, 24, of Gajraula Kala in the Pilibhit district and Shamshad, 25, of Jais were killed. Singh said the bodies have been sent for a post-mortem examination. *—PTI*

London-Hyd flight gets bomb threat, lands safely

HYDERABAD, 23 DEC

A Hyderabad-bound British Airways flight from London has received a bomb threat, prompting aerodrome authorities to initiate standard safety protocols after the aircraft landed here, airport sources said on Tuesday. The customer support service of Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here received a mail bearing a bomb threat to the BA 277 flight from Heathrow to Hyderabad on Monday, they said. "The flight landed safely. The flight has already departed for Heathrow," the sources told PTI. Standard safety protocols include isolation of the aircraft, screening of baggage and passengers, keeping fire engines ready and pressing sniffer dogs into service, among others, sources added. Earlier this month, the Shamshabad airport received two bomb threats. *—PTI*

Delhi HC upholds Sunil Gavaskar's personality rights

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The Delhi High Court has upheld the personality rights of former cricketer and commentator Sunil Gavaskar, ordering the removal of objectionable content from various online platforms. Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora prohibited the unauthorised use of Gavaskar's name and images for commercial purposes without his consent, specifically addressing the misuse of his persona through artificial intelligence and deepfake technology. The court mandated websites to take down offensive material within 72 hours, with further hearings set for 22 May. Gavaskar had previously sought protection against unauthorised use of his likeness. The court's decision follows similar actions by other personalities, including actors such as Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Salman Khan, seeking similar safeguards. *—PTI*

Assam curbs internet amid Karbi Anglong clashes

Shutdown ordered to prevent further escalation of unrest

DIPHU/GUWAHATI, 23 DEC

The Assam government on Tuesday suspended internet services across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts following fresh violence linked to protests over eviction of alleged encroachers, officials said.

The shutdown was ordered to prevent the spread of rumours and further escalation as clashes injured at least eight people.

According to an order issued by the Home and Political Department, internet services will remain suspended until further orders in the interest of public peace and tranquillity. Authorities said the measure was necessary to stop misinformation amid the volatile situation.

The unrest is rooted in demands by several political and social organisations for eviction of settlers from Professional Grazing Reserve and Village Grazing Reserve lands. Protesters had been on a hunger strike for 15 days before calling it off earlier on Tuesday following talks with senior minister Ranoj Pegu, who assured that tripartite discussions would be held soon with the chief minister present.

According to an order issued by the Home and Political Department, internet services will remain suspended until further orders in the interest of public peace and tranquillity **PHOTO: ANI**

Violence first erupted on Monday when protesters went on a rampage, torching the residence of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council chief executive member Tuliram Ronghang and around 15 shops in Kheroni Bazaar. Police opened fire to control the mob, injuring four people.

Later, as news of clashes spread, another group allegedly set ablaze Ronghang's old residence in Donkamokam, prompting further police firing that left three agitators and a policeman injured. Protesters also attempted to attack Kheroni police station but were repulsed.

Authorities imposed prohibitory orders and a night curfew from 5 pm to 6 am across the district. The government said additional forces were deployed from neighbouring districts, while dialogue with all stakeholders is continuing to restore normalcy.

Officials said security reviews are ongoing and appealed to residents to maintain calm and cooperate with law enforcement agencies during operations. *—PTI*

CENTRAL LAB CONFIRMS

Bird flu outbreak in Kerala districts

ALAPPUZHA , 23 DEC

Animal Husbandry Minister J Chinchu Rani confirmed on Tuesday that test results from a central laboratory have verified an avian flu outbreak in both Alappuzha and Kottayam districts.

Following the confirmation, the Kerala State Animal Husbandry Department has begun implementing precautionary measures among poultry in the affected areas. The minister said the department is currently assessing the outbreak's intensity.

The department was first made aware of the potential outbreak last week. Samples were collected and sent to a central laboratory in Bhopal, which has confirmed the outbreak," Rani confirmed. However, the Minister said no restrictions have been imposed on the consumption of poultry products so far. Only after further analysis, if required, steps such as culling and restrictions on the consumption of poultry meat will be announced," she added.

Rani said poultry farmers could be affected as sales usually increase during the Christmas and New Year season."Generally, compensation is provided to farmers. However, on some occasions, there are issues related to fund allocation from the Centre, and the state has to depend on its own funds," she said.

Expert teams are currently working on the ground following the outbreak. The minister said the assessment indicates that flu spreads through migratory birds and noted that similar outbreaks had occurred last year in Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta. *—PTI*

The Animal Husbandry Department has begun implementing precautionary measures among poultry in the affected areas **PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE**

The HC rejected the plea for interim relief on the matter at this time, as to interfere with the investigation **PHOTO: ANI**

Calcutta HC stays hands off Messi event SIT probe

KOLKATA, 23 DEC

The Calcutta High Court has declined to intervene in the SIT (special investigation team) probe into the chaos at Argentine football legend Lionel Messi's event in Kolkata on 13 December. The HC rejected the plea for interim relief on the matter at this time, as to interfere with the investigation.

Acting Chief Justice Sujoy Paul said no material had been placed before the court to show that the investigation was compromised. The division bench, also comprising Justice Partha Sarathi Sen, found no evidence of SIT members having any interest in the event and declined to interfere with the probe at this stage.

Ruling on three PILs, the bench held that an investigation cannot be transferred to the CBI or any other agency merely on request. It directed the state government and the event organiser to file affidavits-in-opposition within four weeks. The three PILs, heard together, will be taken up again in the week beginning 16 February, 2026. *—PTI*

Delhi chokes amid 'severe' AQI

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Delhi woke to choking air and dense fog on Tuesday, with pollution spiking into the severe category and visibility plunging across the capital and parts of north India. At 9am, the city's average air quality index stood at 415, with 27 of 40 monitoring stations recording AQI above 400 and five slipping into the 'severe plus' range, including Anand Vihar, Nehru Nagar and Okhla, official data showed.

Dense fog reduced visibility to 50 metres at Palam and 100 metres at Safdarjung during the early hours, while the minimum temperature settled at 8.8 degrees Celsius, slightly above normal.

Amid the deteriorating conditions, Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena blamed the previous AAP government for the pollution crisis, accusing it of "11 years of neglect and criminal inaction" in a letter to former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal.

He alleged the government failed to curb dust pollution and showed administrative inertia, worsening the capital's air quality.

Elsewhere, fog and cold conditions affected neighbouring states. In Rajasthan, minimum temperatures hovered above eight degrees Celsius in most areas, with dense fog reported in Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Hanumangarh. The weather office forecast a further drop in night temperatures. *—PTI*

A man rides a two-wheeler amid dense fog on a winter morning, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

"The Delhi government will continue its 'No PUC, No fuel' policy even after the GRAP-IV restrictions end

-Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Delhi Environment Minister

Bombay HC warns Mumbai against Delhi-like air crisis

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday expressed serious concern over Mumbai's rising air pollution and unsafe conditions at construction sites, warning of a crisis similar to Delhi.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad directed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and Maharashtra Pollution Control Board to ensure strict compliance with dust control norms.

The Court noted violations at several sites, including missing barriers and faulty air sensors. "Work should continue, but you have to ensure compliance," the Bench said. Officials reported issuing 433 show-cause and 148 stop-work notices, deemed insufficient by the Court. Authorities were asked to submit concrete plans and advisories to protect workers' health, with proposals due by Wednesday. *—PTI*

Passenger attacked by AI Express pilot suffers nasal fracture

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

A passenger allegedly assaulted by an off-duty Air India Express pilot at the Delhi airport said that a CT scan confirmed a displacement of his left nasal bone.

The complainant, Ankit Dewan, said he has submitted a complaint to the Delhi Police and learned through the media that an FIR has been filed.

"I am right now focusing on my health, and a CT scan today showed a displaced fracture of the left nasal bone. I hope I get justice in the matter," Dewan said.

The Delhi Police on Monday said based on Dewan's complaint received via email, a case has been registered. An investigation is underway, they said.

Earlier, the police had said they had not received a complaint.

Passenger Ankit Dewan (right) bleeds after he was allegedly assaulted by off-duty AI Express pilot Virender Sejwal, (left) at Delhi airport. **PHOTO: PTI**

Dewan alleged that he was assaulted by Air India Express captain Virender Sejwal near the security area of Terminal 1 of the airport on 19 December. He said the assault made him bleed and traumatised his seven-year-old daughter. *—PTI*

T'gana Human Rights panel seeks report on Dalit's custodial death

HYDERABAD, 23 DEC

The Telangana Human Rights Commission (TGHRC) has directed the state Home Department to submit a detailed report on the alleged custodial death of a Dalit youth in Suryapet district.

The Commission would consider the case on 12 January, 2026.

The TGHRC took cognisance of the allegations of illegal detention, custodial torture and death of the youth, as alleged by his mother and passed an order on Monday.

The TGHRC noted that the deceased was unlawfully detained by Chilkur and Kodad Rural Police, tortured and denied access to family. Later, the man died on 16 November after being shifted to a government hospital.

The youth's mother, in a representation to the Commission, stated that her son was "illegally" kept in custody between 4 November and 9 November and tortured. He was then implicated in a false criminal case and remanded to judicial custody on 10 November.

She submitted that on 10 November, she received a call from the Huzurnagar Sub-Jail and when she went there she found her son in a serious condition.The complainant submitted that on 14 November, her son was shifted to the District Government Hospital in Suryapet, as his condition was serious, and from there he was shifted to a state hospital in Hyderabad, where he died on 16 November. *—PTI*

READIES LMV3 FOR LAUNCH

Countdown begins for ISRO's BlueBird

SRIHARIKOTA, 23 DEC

The 24-hour countdown began on Tuesday for ISRO's LVM3-M6 mission, which will launch a next-generation US communication satellite from Sriharikota on Wednesday.

In a dedicated commercial mission, the LVM3-M6 heavy-lift rocket is scheduled to lift off at 8.54am from the second launch pad carrying the BlueBird Block-2 spacecraft, the Indian Space Research Organisation said.

Weighing 6,100kg, the satellite will be the heaviest payload placed into low Earth orbit by the LVM3 to date. The previous record was held by the LVM3-M5 Communication Satellite-03, weighing about 4,400 kg, launched on 2 November.

The mission is being undertaken under a commercial agreement between NewSpace India Ltd, ISRO's commercial arm, and US-based AST SpaceMobile.

Weighing 6,100kg, the satellite will be the heaviest payload placed into low Earth orbit by the LVM3 to date **PHOTO: PTI**

BlueBird Block-2 is designed to provide high-speed cellular broadband directly to smartphones across the world. AST SpaceMobile is building a space-based cellular broadband network accessible without specialised devices for commercial and government use.

Ahead of the launch, ISRO Chairman V Narayanan offered prayers at the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Tirumala on 23 December.

The 43.5-metre-tall LVM3, also known as Gaganyaan-class GSLV MkIII, is a three-stage launch vehicle with a cryogenic upper stage developed by ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.

It uses two S200 solid boosters, developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, to generate the thrust required for lift-off.

About 15 minutes after launch, the satellite is expected to separate into orbit nearly 600km above Earth. *—PTI*

Kerala to challenge Dileep acquittal verdict

KOCHI, 23 DEC

The Kerala government will move the High Court against the 2017 actress assault verdict, challenging the acquittal of actor Dileep and the sentences awarded to six convicted accused, sources said Tuesday.

Sources in the Director General of Prosecution's office said the state has cleared the filing of an appeal against the Ernakulam District and Principal Sessions Court judgment.

Special Public Prosecutor V Aja Kumar said the appeal would be filed after the Kerala High Court's Christmas vacation. "I have been informed that approval has been granted," he said.

Kumar said he submitted a detailed report to the prosecution directorate and prepared the grounds for appeal.

"The government has taken a clear stand that no time should be wasted," he said.

The state will challenge the 20-year rigorous imprisonment awarded to six accused, including prime accused Pulsar Suni, and the acquittal of Dileep and three others.

Kumar said the trial court relied on testimonies of around 60 witnesses to convict six accused but rejected the same evidence while acquitting the remaining accused.

The crime occurred during a journey after a shoot. *—PTI*

SIKHS VS KIWI FURY

A Sikh parade in New Zealand was disrupted on Saturday when a Christian group heckled participants in South Auckland. According to the New Zealand Herald, the group, identified as True Patriots of NZ and linked to politician Brian Tamaki's Destiny Church, confronted the procession while performing the haka, an indigenous Maori dance. Videos shared online showed members wearing blue shirts with slogans such as 'Kiwis First' and 'Keep NZ, NZ', holding a banner that read, 'This is New Zealand, not India', as police stood between the two sides. The New Zealand Sikh Youth condemned the incident

PHOTO: PTI

India privatises its nuclear sector, but at what cost?

Last week, Parliament approved legislation that opens nuclear power generation to private and foreign companies.

The landmark Atomic Energy Act marks a significant government shift as India moves towards increased nuclear energy and reduced dependence on fossil fuels in order to meet climate targets.

India is seeking to boost its nuclear power capacity tenfold to 100 gigawatts by 2047, which would be enough to power nearly 60 million Indian homes annually and is essential to achieving carbon neutrality by 2070.

Reaching this target requires around Rs 20 trillion in investment that the new legislation aims to unlock from private sources.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said it "marks a transformational moment for our technology landscape" and also opens "numerous opportunities" for the private sector.

Major Indian conglomerates, including Tata Power, Adani Power and Reliance Industries, have already signalled their interest in entering the countries tightly controlled civil nuclear power sector.

Nuclear reform spurs safety concerns

Alongside the government optimism, many experts warn of potential challenges, ranging from liability caps and regulatory oversight to safety standards, which could complicate India's nuclear power ambitions.

Ajay Bisaria, a former Indian envoy to Pakistan, said the legislation removes the legal barriers that kept US and French companies out since 2010, enabling India to diversify beyond Russia.

"This reform moves India-US nuclear cooperation from political signaling to commercial reality. Joint statements on large reactors and SMRs [small modular reactors] can now translate into actual projects, with improved Indo-US relations expected in 2026 providing further momentum," Bisaria told DW.

"Licensing timelines, localisation requirements, nuclear material safeguards for imported fuel, financing constraints and questions about regulatory capacity are issues."

India is seeking to boost its nuclear power capacity tenfold to 100 gigawatts by 2047 ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

US interest questioned in India's nuclear shift

Opposition parties have alleged India's new legislation — dubbed "SHANTI" (meaning "peace" in Hindi), an acronym for Sustainable Harnessing of Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India — was expedited to meet US demands.

The Indian reform coincides with US President Donald Trump signing the National Defense Authorisation Act (NDAA) on 18 December.

The NDAA, a sweeping defence policy bill, includes provisions mandating a joint US-India consultative mechanism to align New Delhi's domestic nuclear liability rules with international norms.

INDIA BALANCES SAFETY WITH INVESTMENT PUSH

Jairam Ramesh, a senior member of India's main opposition Indian National Congress party, claimed that recent changes to the country's nuclear liability framework were pushed through Parliament to align domestic law with US interests.

The Indian government maintains that the country's energy security needs and clean energy commitments are driving the nuclear reform.

Sameer Patil, director of the security, strategy and technology center at the Observer Research Foundation, a think tank, said that the policy shift is a necessary structural reform to unlock private investment for India's nuclear ambitions.

"However, there are several challenges, such as the lack of indigenous supply of fuel supplies being a chief concern. This makes the sector and country vulnerable to vagaries of geopolitics," Patil told DW.

"The question of safety and oversight, frankly, in my opinion, is a trade-off between incentivizing commercial participation and imposing reasonable safeguards."

Patil noted the nuclear legislation's current provisions may seem inadequate given the possible damage from a nuclear accident, but they are sufficient to keep private companies interested in India's nuclear expansion plans.

SKEPTICISM OVER PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE

However, a government official familiar with the nuclear sector, speaking on condition of anonymity, expressed skepticism.

"India's nuclear industry has consistently missed targets, and the private sector's track record of abandoning high-risk ventures like gas and hydro raises questions about sustaining capital-intensive nuclear commitments with weakened liability protections," the official told DW.

Anil Wadhwa, a former diplomat with extensive experience in nuclear and disarmament issues, told DW that India faces implementation challenges to realize its ambitious goal.

"Supply-side issues include poor domestic uranium quality, the need for skilled workforce development, and insufficient manufacturing capacity for reactor components," said Wadhwa.

Safety caps and supply gaps under fire

Wadhwa said that debates were continuing around critical issues.

"Whether liability caps of Rs 15 billion are adequate for major accidents, whether the regulatory body, Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, has sufficient independence from government, and how to properly balance commercial incentives with safety standards," queried Wadhwa.

Japan's Fukushima disaster in 2011 cost over $200 billion in cleanup and compensation, more than 1,200 times India's proposed liability cap.

The Chernobyl accident's total economic impact exceeded $700 billion when accounting for long-term health costs, evacuations, and contaminated land loss.

For foreign companies, Wadhwa said, India's earlier Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) of 2010 allowed operators to sue suppliers for equipment defects, unlike global norms where only operators bear liability.

"This law fundamentally reforms this by aligning closer to international standards," said Wadhwa. *—DW News*

SALAR ساہر

UK singer 'ran to save his life' at Kolkata's Messi event

What was meant to be a once-in-a-lifetime musical tribute to football legend Lionel Messi turned into a harrowing experience for London-based Indian singer Charles Antony, who flew to the country specially to perform at the event at Salt Lake stadium here.

Antony, a Malayali who sings in 18 languages, including Bengali, had composed a special Spanish song for Messi to welcome him in Kolkata, but was not able to sing that as he ran for his life amid chaos during the 13 December event at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan here.

"I ran to save my life," Antony told PTI, recalling how the celebration descended into mobocracy as crowd control collapsed inside the packed stadium.

Angry fans, many of whom had paid Rs 4,000 to Rs 12,000 — and in some cases up to Rs 20,000 in the black market — ran riot at the venue after failing to get even a glimpse of their favourite superstar from Argentina.

"I had barely seen him. He was smiling, but it was very clear he was uncomfortable," Antony vividly recalled, even after 10 days had passed.

Positioned on the running tracks near the gallery, the singer was waiting for Messi to complete his lap around the ground when the situation worsened.

Antony saw Messi, his long-time strike partner Luis Suárez and Argentine teammate Rodrigo De Paul being surrounded by many people.

He noticed water bottles, food packets, stones and metal objects being hurled from the gallery. Equipment was on the verge of being damaged, and panic had set in.

"I was lucky I was not injured, and none of my equipment was damaged," he said.

The singer said there was confusion over reporting time, with instructions given to reach the venue at both 10.30am and 9.30am on 13 December for a sound check, and he had not had the opportunity to visit the stadium the previous day.

Personally invited by now-arrested event organiser Satadru Dutta to sing at the Messi events in Kolkata, Mumbai and New Delhi, Antony had travelled from London and was staying at the Hyatt Hotel here.

Having sung in the presence of Diego Maradona during his visit to Kolkata in 2016, an experience Antony describes as joyous and perfectly managed, the contrast was stark.

"When Maradona came to Kolkata in 2016, I was inside the inner circle. Nothing went wrong then. This time, I was outside the core circle," he said.

Antony said the size of the crowd, on both occasions, was huge.

"This is the first time in my life I saw nearly one lakh people in one place. Luckily, I got the chance to sing a couple of songs at the event. Otherwise, it would have been a waste of travelling all the way from London. And now, I have become the first Indian to sing with Maradona and for Messi," he said.

Antony said people began storming the ground after VVIPs were escorted through an underground exit and former India cricket captain Sourav Ganguly left the stadium.

"That's when the police told me to run to a safe place," he said.

With no assistance from anyone, the singer grabbed whatever he could, his guitar, cables, mouth organs, and vocal processors, stuffing them into bags.

"Everyone was worried about the VVIPs. Nobody was concerned about my safety," he said.

With his access tag still hanging around his neck, Antony felt even more vulnerable on that day.

"People misjudged me as one of the organisers. At one point, my life was under threat," he said.

Police advised him to move towards the centre of the ground to avoid attacks from the galleries, he said.

Eventually, Antony ran all the way back to the hotel, later shifting to another hotel for safety.

"I had no time to look for anyone else. I ran to save my life," he said.

In the aftermath, Antony tried repeatedly to contact Satadru Dutta to understand what would happen next, but could not reach him.

"There was complete uncertainty. I was getting very agitated," he admitted.

He also witnessed the heartbreak of fans.

"People had come from Meghalaya, Assam, Bengaluru just to see Messi. They couldn't even see Messi and were very disappointed. and I saw many crying," he said.

Antony clarified that he did not take any remuneration for the performances. The organisers only covered his travel costs from London and his accommodation in India.

Despite the ordeal, he refused to single out Satadru, the organiser, for mismanagement at the stadium.

"I don't believe Satadru is solely responsible. He (Satadru) tried his best to stop people from coming close to Messi. But some others, possibly VVIPs, were taking selfies. He was visibly helpless. Everything went out of control," Antony said.

For the singer, the day remains a painful memory, not just because he couldn't sing for Messi, but because what should have been a celebration of football turned into a fight for survival. *—PTI*

Antony, a Malayali who sings in 18 languages, including Bengali, had composed a special song for Messi to welcome him in Kolkata, but was not able to sing amid chaos during the event ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Jhumri Telaiya: The small town that became India's radio request capital

BINACA GEETMALA TURNS 100

"Agli farmaish hai Jhumri Telaiya se" — the words once carried a magical ring, setting hearts pounding in this quaint town nestled amid nature and beside a serene lake.

The nostalgia still grips Jhumri Telaiya, part of a rich mica belt discovered by the British in 1890, which shot to national fame in the early 1950s when Radio Ceylon and All India Radio's Vividh Bharati were inundated with song requests from the town.

As Sri Lanka's Radio Ceylon, the broadcaster that popularised the iconic weekly Hindi film song countdown Binaca Geetmala, turned 100 this week, memories came rushing back in Jhumri Telaiya, where many still fondly remember it simply as "Radio Ceylon".

This was the town where countless listeners tuned in eagerly to hear their favourite songs, often thumping tables the moment announcers such as Ameen Sayani declared: "Agli farmaish hai Jhumri Telaiya se."

According to Rajiv Ranjan, a 1991-batch Indian Revenue Service officer with the Ministry of Finance, Jhumri Telaiya's passion for music is deeply linked to its economic history and the discovery of vast deposits of mica in the region in 1890.

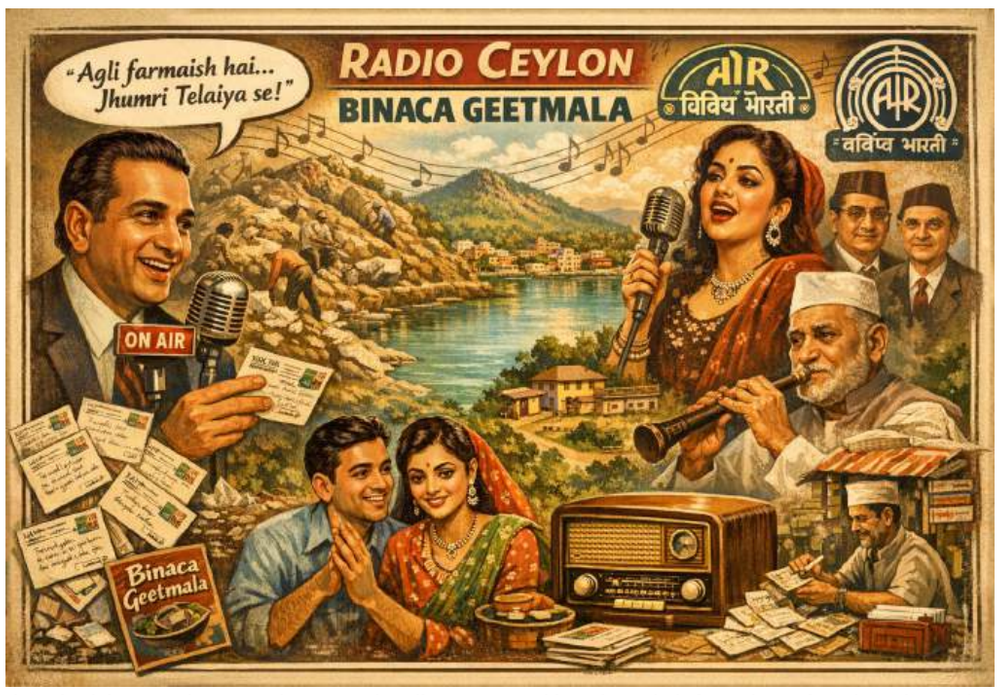
"The mica tycoons of Jhumri Telaiya - Chattu Ram Bhadani and Horil Ram Bhadani - controlled nearly 1,000 mines in the region. These businessmen spearheaded the transformation of the sleepy village into a mining powerhouse with a fondness for music," Ranjan, son of Late Dr Sarla Singh, a well-known figure there, whose family lived there for five decades, told PTI.

"The famous Bhadani family even got Suraiya, (a well-known Bollywood playback singer) from Bombay, to perform at a concert there. My family, including my father Late Baikunth Prasad Singh, was instrumental in bringing Ustad Bismillah Khan there in 1971," he added.

"We still remember 'Dilka Khilauna Haay Toot Gaya' sung by Ustad Bismillah Khan," Ranjan recalled.

An alumnus of Sainik School Tilaiya and currently posted in Chennai, Ranjan said the radio craze gathered momentum when a mica trader, Rameshwar Prasad Barnwal, began mailing postcards with song requests to Radio Ceylon on a daily basis for Binaca Geetmala.

"Because Barnwal was a regular mailer, his name started appearing regularly in the requests announced in the show. This motivated other residents of Jhumri Telaiya to send in their requests as well," said Ranjan.



Jhumri Telaiya was the town where countless listeners tuned in to hear their favourites, often thumping tables the moment announcers such as Ameen Sayani declared: 'Agli farmaish hai Jhumri Telaiya se' ***PHOTO: AI***

Soon, sending farmaishein became a town-wide phenomenon. Radio enthusiasts formed informal listeners' clubs and competed to see who could send the maximum number of requests in a day or month.

According to Ranjan, when All India Radio resumed broadcasting old Hindi film songs on Vividh Bharati in 1957, the station received hundreds of requests from Jhumri Telaiya. To ease the workload, AIR even printed standardised request formats on postcards.

"At a time when radio programmes were a national phenomenon, most requests for film songs received by the stations came from Jhumri Telaiya. The trend started in the early 1950s when Barnwal started sending 20-25 song requests to Radio Ceylon daily. Barnwal's name, which he heard regularly on the radio, inspired paan shopkeeper Ganga Prasad Magadhiya and electronics trader Nandlal Sinha to follow suit," says the history of Jhumri Telaiya.

Leading industrialist Rahul Modi, whose grandfather Rameshwar Modi was a prominent mica trader, earlier told PTI, "My grandfather and others used to bet on whose name would be announced on a particular day during the music request programme."

Sainik School Tilaiya Old Boys' Association (SANTOBA) president Ashish Sinha says Jhumri Teliaya has its identity due to radio.

Dr Deepak Kumar, a doctor associated with a UN body, recalled that radios were prohibited in the school hostel.

"We somehow managed to listen to Binaca Geetmala. We could hear songs drifting in from staff quarters. At that time, Jhumri Telaiya was part of Hazaribag district," he said.

Retired Merchant Navy officer Capt Arun Kumar Singh, who studied in the school between 1970 and 1977, said access to radio was restricted but not impossible.

"We were not allowed to keep personal radio sets and had no direct access to them. The student assigned to read the news for the school assembly would go to the House Master's residence, where teachers generously allowed us to use their radio sets. Apart from listening to the news, we made full use of the opportunity to hear Binaca Geetmala," he added.

"There used to be a radio in the mess. We would run from class just before the programme began. That joy is etched in my memory," he added. Binaca Geetmala was broadcast on Radio Ceylon from 1952 to 1988 before moving to All India Radio's Vividh Bharati in 1989, where it continued till 1994.

For nearly four decades, millions across India tuned in to hear Ameen Sayani's iconic voice, and more often than not, the next request came from Jhumri Telaiya. *—PTI*

2 killed as Syrian authorities clash with Kurdish forces

DAMASCUS, 23 DEC

Clashes erupted between Syrian security forces and Kurdish fighters on Monday as top Turkish officials visited Damascus ahead of a deadline to implement a deal between the government and Kurdish-led forces. Syria's state-run SANA news agency reported that two civilians were killed and 15 were wounded by shelling, and that dozens of families fled two neighbourhoods of northern Syrian city Aleppo. Late on Monday evening, the Syrian Defence Ministry announced an order to halt fire. It was not clear how the clashes started. In Damascus Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said his talks with Syrian officials focused on the integration of the SDF into the new Syrian army, as well as on Israel's military incursions in southern Syria. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Hunger strikers: Greta held in UK protest

LONDON, 23 DEC

Activist Greta Thunberg was arrested in central London on Tuesday while supporting pro-Palestinian activists who are on a hunger strike to protest their imprisonment. The protest group Prisoners for Palestine shared a video showing the 22-year-old Swede holding a sign supporting the hunger strikers and their organisation, known as Palestine Action. The British government earlier this year banned Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation. Eight members went on a hunger strike to protest their detention without bail as they await trial on charges related to earlier protests around the country. Two prisoners have been on hunger strike for 52 days and are at a "critical stage, where death is a real possibility," Prisoners for Palestine said. *—PTI*

S Korea forms 'rebellion courts' after Yoon case

SEOUL, 23 DEC

South Korea's legislature on Tuesday passed a bill mandating specialised panels in Seoul's district and High Courts for cases involving rebellion, treason and foreign subversion after complaints about the pace of the rebellion trial of jailed former president Yoon Suk Yeol. The bill, which is likely to be approved by President Lee Jae Myung, would fall short of the effect the Democratic Party initially sought from the liberal-led legislature. The law would require the Seoul Central District Court and the Seoul High Court to establish at least two specialised panels for cases involving rebellion, treason and foreign subversion. *—PTI*

2,700 prisoners to be swapped in Yemen

CAIRO, 23 DEC

Yemen's internationally recognised government and the Iran-backed Houthi group have reached an agreement to free around 2,700 detainees held throughout the war in Yemen, according to Saudi and Houthi officials. Saudi Ambassador Mohamed Al-Jabir said in a statement on X that the agreement was signed under the supervision of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen and the International Committee of the Red Cross, "which will enable all detainees to return to their families." The prisoners would include Saudi and Sudanese nationals, according to Abdelkader al-Murtada, the Houthi head of the National Committee for Prisoners' Affairs and Mohamed Abdusalam, a Houthi spokesperson. *—PTI*

Trump flew 8 times on Epstein's jet, new files reveal

Largest release of Epstein files with 30,00 pages

WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) released thousands of files about convicted sex trafficker Jefferey Epstein, with dozens of references to US President Donald Trump. Trump is believed to flown on Epstein's private jet "many more times than previously reported" with a 2020 email chain placing the number of at least eight flights between 1993 and 1996. Epstein, Trump and a 20-year-old woman are listed as the lone passengers.

On two other flights, two passengers listed with Trump were women who "would be possible witnesses" in a case against Ghislaine Maxwell, the attorney wrote, while on other flights, Trump flew with his former wife, Marla Maples, his daughter Tiffany and his son Eric.

Tuesday's release was the DoJ's largest release so far – with over 11,000 files and over 30,000 pages follows the release of seven other batches over Friday and Saturday, which were criticised for being heavily censored.

Notably, the DoJ has said that the files contains claims about Trump that are "untrue" and sensationalised, that were submitted to the FBI before the 2020 election.

The files also contain and email by 'A' from 'Balmoral' asking in Epstein's associate and Ghislaine Maxwell "have you found me some new inappropriate friends?" in 2001. The sender is believed to be former prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

In another letter that Epstein reportedly penned to Larry Nassar, former US Olympics gymnastics team doctor, who is convicted of sexual abuse, the financier said, "our love & caring for young ladies and the hope they reach their full potential."

Recently released photos show US President Donald Trump and late convicted sex trafficker Jefferey Epstein at a party *PHOTO: DOJ*

Our President (Donald Trump) also shares our love of young, nubile girls. When a young beauty walked by, he loved to 'grab snatch,' whereas we ended up snatching grub in the mess halls of the system. Life is unfair.

-Jefferey Epstein, convicted sex trafficker

I think Bill Clinton's a big boy, he can handle it, but you probably have pictures being exposed of other people that innocently met Jeffrey Epstein years ago

-Donald Trump, US President

Epstein said that Trump has the same love for "young, nubile girls". However, in 2020, the files contained a letter request from FBI New York for a lab to "perform a handwriting analysis" to confirm if the writing belonged to Epstein, though it's unclear whether the examination took place.

Trump has long denied being complicit in any of Epstein's illegal activities, even saying that he ended friendship with the late financer after "he did something very bad" and said there was no point releasing the files related to the late trafficker because it was a "Democrat hoax". However, he gave into public pressure and ordered the DoJ to release all files recently.

The files released on Friday and Saturday included dozens of photos of former president Bill Clinton as well as several other prominent figures such as musicians Michael Jackson and Mick Jagger, actor Kevin Spacey and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates.

However, being depicted in the images does not imply any wrongdoing and many of those identified in previous releases have denied any wrongdoing in relation to Epstein.

The latest release reveals previously unseen details about Epstein's connections, but many were not available at the time of publishing. *—Agencies*

Trump names new warship after himself

Initially, two 'Trump-class' vessels will be built. It will later be expanded to 20-25 *PHOTO: WH*

WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

US President Donald Trump announced plans to build a new generation of warships after himself - Trump-class vessels.

The Republican said on Monday that the two Trump-class vessels would be "some of the most lethal surface warfare ships" and "the largest battleship in the history of our country". He signalled that eventually 20-25 ships would be built.

Asked if the ships were to counter Beijing's increased military presence, Trump said, "It's a counter to everybody. It's not China. We get along great with China".

'MADURO WOULD BE SMART TO QUIT'

Trump said that it would be "smart" for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to relinquish power, as the US continues to ramp up military near the South American nation.

While the White House has framed its increased military presence as an anti-drug operation, the latest comments--coupled with the recent seizure of two tankers off the coast of Venezuela – signal a deeper motive.

On Sunday, the US began pursuing a "dark fleet" vessel in international waters which was sailing towards Venezuela to load oil.

Venezuelan labelled the move an "act of piracy", while Russia said it could have "wide-reaching consequences".

US BOMBS ANOTHER 'DRUG BOAT'

The US military said it conducted another strike against a boat for allegedly smuggling drugs in the Pacific Ocean, killing one person and taking the total toll to at least 105 people. *—Agencies*

New Denmark, Greenland envoy sparks fear

WEST PALM BEACH, 23 DEC

The leaders of Denmark and Greenland insisted Monday that the US won't take over Greenland and demanded respect for their territorial integrity after President Donald Trump announced the appointment of a special envoy to the semi-autonomous territory.

"We need Greenland for national security," Trump said after naming Louisiana Gov Jeff Landry as the envoy. "And if you take a look at Greenland, you look up and down the coast, you have Russian and Chinese ships all over the place."

Denmark's Foreign Minister said that he would summon the US ambassador to his ministry.

"You cannot annex another country. Not even with an argument about international security," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her Greenlandic counterpart, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said in a joint statement.

"We expect respect for our joint territorial integrity," it added. *—PTI*

FIVE KILLED AS MEXICAN NAVY JET CRASHES IN TEXAS

A small Mexican Navy plane transporting a one-year-old child and seven others crashed on Monday near Galveston, killing at least five people. Four of the people aboard were Navy officers, and four were civilians, including a child, Mexico's Navy said. It was not immediately clear which of the passengers survived. Two of the passengers were from a non-profit organisation that provides aid to Mexican children with severe burns, including transports to a Galveston hospital. The cause of the crash is under investigation. The crash took place on Monday afternoon in Galveston Bay near the base of the causeway that connects Galveston Island to the mainland. Emergency responders rushed to the scene near the popular beach destination. *— PTI*

Volunteers respond to a Mexican Navy plane crash in Texas *PHOTO: PTI*

Pak to sell $4B worth of weapons to Libya

KARACHI/TRIPOLI, 23 DEC

Pakistan is set to sell at least $4 billion worth of military equipment to the Libyan National Army, despite a UN arms embargo on the fractured North African country, Reuters reported.

The deal, one of Pakistan's largest-ever weapons sales, was finalised after Pakistan military chief Field Marshal Asim Munir met Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the LNA Saddam Khalifa Haftar in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi, four officials told Reuters.

Munir reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthening defence ties with Libya, Dawn said.

A copy of the deal before it was finalised listed the purchase of 16 JF-17 fighter jets, a multi-role combat aircraft that has been jointly developed by Pakistan and China, and 12 Super Mushak trainer aircraft, used for basic pilot training, Reuters said. It is unclear if the deal had been altered.

The draft also included the sale of equipment for land, sea and air, spread over two-and-a-half years.

Haftar had visited Pakistan in July and discussed defence cooperation. *—Agencies*

Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir and Libyan Deputy Commander in Chief Saddam Khalifa Haftar *PHOTO: X*

A residential house burns after a Russian strike in Kyiv region, Ukraine. The strikes caused power outages as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy noted that it comes just before Christmas *PHOTO: PTI*

Russian drones kill 3 in Ukraine

KYIV, 23 DEC

Russia fired more than 650 drones and three dozen missiles at Ukraine in a large-scale attack that began during the night and stretched into daylight hours Tuesday, officials said. At least three people were killed, including a 4-year-old child.

The barrage struck homes and the power grid in 13 regions of Ukraine, causing widespread outages in the bitter winter.

'90% OF UKRAINIAN PRIORITIES ENSURED'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that "nearly 90 per cent" of Ukraine's demands have been incorporated into the draft 28-point plan as negotiations continued in Miami, saying the progress was "quite solid.".

There is also a framework document on security guarantees between Ukraine, European countries, and the US, as well as a separate document on bilateral security guarantees granted to Ukraine by the US, he said.

Zelenskyy mentioned several key points, such as the Ukrainian army remaining at a peacetime level of 8,00,000; membership in the European Union; and European forces, under the leadership of France and the UK and with a "backstop" from Washington to ensure "Ukraine's security in the air, on land, and at sea." *—PTI*

US judge to hear plea on funeral home abusing 191 corpses

DENVER, 23 DEC

A state judge in Colorado has accepted plea agreements for the owners of a local funeral home who admitted to abusing 191 corpses. Carie and Jon Hallford, former operators of the Return to Nature Funeral Home in Colorado Springs, kept bodies in a room-temperature building for years and provided fake ashes to grieving families. The latest agreements propose a sentence of 30 to 50 years for Jon Hallford and 25 to 35 years for Carie Hallford, to run concurrently with their federal sentences.

Families of the victims expressed their outrage, seeking a 191-year sentence—one year for each victim. State District Judge Eric Bentley acknowledged the families' advocacy that led to increased sentence ranges.

Carie Hallford's lawyer noted that she could receive probation if convicted at trial. Investigators found the corpses stacked in unsanitary conditions in Penrose, with some left to decompose for up to four years.

The Hallfords also pleaded guilty to defrauding the US Small Business Administration of nearly $900,000 in pandemic relief funds. Sentencing dates are set for 2026. *—PTI*

FERARI GOES UP IN FLAMES

'Call of Duty' co-creator dies in car crash

WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

Vince Zampella, one of the creators behind best-selling video games as 'Call of Duty,' has died, said gaming giant Electronic Arts. He was 55. He reportedly died while driving a Ferrari on a scenic Los Angles road on Sunday.

"For unknown reasons, the vehicle veered off the roadway, struck a concrete barrier, and became fully engulfed," the California Highway Patrol (CHP) said in a statement, without identifying the passengers. Both victims succumbed to their injuries. It was unclear who the other passenger was at the time of publishing.

Vince Zampella died on scenic Los Angeles road at 55 *PHOTO: X*

In 2010, Zampella founded Respawn Entertainment, a subsidiary of EA, and he also was the former chief executive of video game developer Infinity Ward, the studio behind the successful "Call of Duty" franchise.

"A friend, colleague, leader and visionary creator, his work helped shape modern interactive entertainment and inspired millions of players and developers around the world. His legacy will continue to shape how games are made and how players connect for generations to come," an Electronic Arts spokesperson said in a statement.

One of Zampella's crowning achievements was the creation of the 'Call of Duty' franchise, which has sold more than half a billion games worldwide,

The first-person shooter game debuted in 2003 as a World War II simulation. There is a live-action movie based on the game in production with Paramount Pictures.

In recent years, Zampella has been at the helm of the creation of the action adventure video games 'Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order' and 'Star Wars Jedi: Survivor'. *—PTI*

One dies in California's flash floods

REDDING, 23 DEC

Heavy rain and flash flooding soaked roads in northern California, as at least one person was confirmed dead, authorities said on Monday.

In Redding, a city at the northern end of California's Central Valley, a motorist died after calling 911 while trapped in their vehicle as it filled up with water, Mayor Mike Littau said. Police said they received numerous calls for drivers stranded in flooded areas.

The Redding area saw between 3 and 6 inches of rain from Saturday through Sunday night, the National Weather Service said.

The National Weather Service expects rain through the Christmas week as a series of atmospheric rivers was forecast to make its way through.

A large swath of the Sacramento Valley and surrounding areas was under a flood watch through Friday.

Earlier, atmospheric rivers drenched Washington state with nearly 5 trillion gallons of rain in a week. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee rises 3P to settle at 89.65 against USD

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The rupee rose 3 paise to settle at 89.65 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday on the back of a weaker greenback. However, a rise in global crude oil prices, coupled with foreign capital outflows, prevented sharper gains in the local unit, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 89.67 and traded in the range of 89.59-89.85 before settling at 89.65 (provisional) against the greenback, up 3 paise from its previous close. The rupee on Monday settled slightly down by 1 paisa at 89.68 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.34 per cent lower at 97.95. *—PTI*

Noida Airport, Tech Mahindra partner for security ops

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Noida International Airport (NIA) and Tech Mahindra have partnered to set up an integrated Network and Security Operations Centre (NOC-SOC) for the upcoming airport. Tech Mahindra, a leading technology services firm, will provide round-the-clock network and security management for the airport's critical IT infrastructure. This partnership covers applications, databases, and digital platforms, emphasizing a process-driven approach to cybersecurity. The integrated NOC-SOC will facilitate proactive detection, analysis, and response to network and cybersecurity incidents, ensuring security across airport operations. The Noida Airport is being developed under a public-private partnership by a subsidiary of Zurich Airport International. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

RBI to purchase ₹2L cr OMO, $10B USD/INR swap

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday said it will purchase government securities worth Rs 2 lakh crore and conduct a USD 10 billion buy/sell dollar-rupee swap auction to inject liquidity in the banking system. The OMO (Open Market Operations) purchase and swap auctions will be conducted between 29 December, 2025 and 22 January, 2026. Announcing the decision, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it will continue to monitor evolving liquidity and market conditions and take measures as appropriate to ensure orderly liquidity conditions. The latest announcement comes days after the RBI conducted Rs 1 lakh crore OMO purchase auctions of Government of India securities and USD/INR Buy/Sell Swap auction of USD 5 billion for a tenor of three years. On a review of current liquidity and financial conditions, the central bank on Tuesday said it has decided to conduct the OMO and swap operations to inject liquidity into the banking system. OMO purchase auctions of Government of India securities for an aggregate amount of Rs 2,00,000 crore will be held in four tranches of Rs 50,000 crore each on 29 December, 2025, 5 January, 12 January, and 22 January, 2026. "USD/INR Buy/Sell Swap auction of USD 10 billion for a tenor of 3 years to be held on 13 January, 2026," it said. The swap is in the nature of a simple buy/sell foreign exchange swap from the Reserve Bank side. A bank shall sell US dollars to the RBI and simultaneously agree to buy same amount of US dollars at the end of the swap period. *—PTI*

Mercedes to pay $149.6M for cheating emission tests

Over 2 lakh vehicles had software that optimised emission

MADISON, 23 DEC

Mercedes-Benz USA and parent company Daimler AG have agreed to pay USD 149.6 million to settle allegations that the automaker secretly installed devices in hundreds of thousands of vehicles to pass emission tests, a coalition of attorneys general announced Monday.

According to the coalition, between 2008 and 2016, the German automaker equipped more than 2,11,000 diesel passenger cars and vans with software devices that optimised emission controls during tests but reduced the controls during normal operations. The devices enabled vehicles to far exceed legal limits for nitrogen oxides, a pollutant that can cause respiratory illnesses and contributes to smog.

The states alleged that Mercedes installed the devices because it couldn't reach design and performance goals, such as fuel efficiency, while complying with emissions standards. The automaker allegedly concealed the devices from state and federal regulators and the public while marketing the vehicles as "environmentally friendly" and compliant with emissions standards.

PHOTO: MERCEDES

- Daimler AG and Mercedes-Benz USA already agreed in 2020 to pay USD 1.5 billion to the US government and California state regulators to resolve the emissions cheating allegations.

A spokesperson for the automaker had no immediate comment.

Daimler AG and Mercedes-Benz USA already agreed in 2020 to pay USD 1.5 billion to the US government and California state regulators to resolve the emissions cheating allegations.

Fifty attorney generals, including the attorney generals of the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, made up the coalition announced Monday. California was not part of the group.

The settlement calls for the automaker to pay the attorney generals USD 120 million, with another USD 29 million payment suspended and potentially waived pending completion of a consumer relief program.

That effort will extend to the roughly 40,000 vehicles with the devices that hadn't been repaired or permanently removed from the road by August 1, 2023.

The owners of those vehicles would get USD 2,000 per vehicle if they install approved emissions modification software and an extended warranty.

The settlement also calls for Mercedes to comply with reporting requirements and refrain from any further unfair or deceptive marketing or sale of diesel vehicles.*—PTI*

SECOND STRAIGHT DAY

Gold scales new peak of ₹1.4L/10g; Silver hits record of ₹2.17L/kg

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Gold prices stayed in ascending order for the second straight day, climbing Rs 2,650 to a fresh peak of Rs 1,40,850 per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday, tracking robust trends in the global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 1,38,200 per 10g on Monday.

So far this year, gold prices in the domestic market have jumped by Rs 61,900, or 78.40 per cent, from Rs 78,950 per 10g recorded on December 31, 2024.

Silver also rallied for the second consecutive day, surging Rs 2,750 to touch a record of Rs 2,17,250 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). In the previous session, the white metal settled at Rs 2,14,500 per kg after registering a sharp rise of Rs 10,400 per kg.

"An unprecedented rally continues in bullion, with spot gold nearing another milestone at the USD 4,500 mark.

During the calendar year, silver prices have added Rs 1,27,550, or 142.2 per cent, from Rs 89,700 per kilogram recorded on December 31, 2024.

On Tuesday, spot gold increased by USD 54.3, or 1.22 per cent, to hit a record of USD 4,498 per ounce in the international markets.

During the calendar year, spot gold prices have surged by USD 1,892.23, or 72.62 per cent, from USD 2,605.77 per ounce, recorded on December 31, 2024.

Meanwhile, spot silver rose 1.4 per cent to breach the USD 70-per-ounce mark for the first time in the overseas trade. So far this year, silver prices have soared by USD 41.03, or 141.62 per cent, from USD 28.97 per ounce, recorded on 31 December, 2024. *—PTI*

Markets slip after 2-day winning streak

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

Benchmark stock index BSE Sensex slipped by 42 points in a volatile trade on Tuesday following profit-taking in IT and pharma shares and mixed global cues.

Snapping the two-day gaining streak, the 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 42.64 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 85,524.84. The index moved in a range during the day, hitting a high of 85,704.93 and a low of 85,342.99.

The 50-share NSE Nifty closed marginally up by 4.75 points or 0.02 per cent to 26,177.15.

Metals, FMCG and energy shares witnessed buying interest, while IT and pharma saw selective pressure.

Among Sensex firms, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Adani Ports, Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra, Eternal, Axis Bank and Maruti were the major laggards.

However, ITC, UltraTech Cement, Tata Steel and HDFC Bank were among the gainers.

The BSE smallcap index climbed 0.38 per cent and midcap gauge went up marginally by 0.07 per cent. *—PTI*

NZ to amend laws for GI registration of Indian goods

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

New Zealand has made a commitment under its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India to amend its laws to allow geographical indication (GI) registration of Indian goods beyond wines and spirits. At present, New Zealand's GI law permits registration only for wines and spirits from India. Products with a GI tag convey an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

The two countries announced the conclusion of the FTA negotiations. The pact is likely to be implemented after the signing of the document, and the process may take about 7-8 months from now. "The timeline for amending the FTA is 18 months from the agreement's entry into force," the commerce ministry said. Founder and Chairman of Great Mission Group Society (GMGS) Ganesh Hingmire said that this is a positive move as it would help boost exports of GI products. "Getting a GI tag for non-agri goods will help increase the income of our people also," he said.

New Zealand Minister Todd McClay with Union Minister Piyush Goyal during a meeting, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

GI is a form of intellectual property right used mainly for agricultural, natural and manufactured products, that originate from a specific geographical area. Indian products with GI tags include Basmati rice, Darjeeling tea, Mysore silk, Kullu shawl, Kangra tea, Thanjavur paintings, Allahabad surkha, Farrukhabad prints, Lucknow zardozi and Kashmir walnut wood carving. A GI tag ensures that only authorised users can sell a product under that name. *—PTI*

Sebi approves IPOs for Dhariwal Buildtech, ESDS, BLS Polymers

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Construction firm Dhariwal Buildtech, cloud infrastructure and data centre services provider ESDS Software Solution, and BLS Polymers have secured approval from SEBI to raise funds through initial public offerings (IPOs), according to an update with the regulator on Tuesday.

All three IPOs will comprise entirely fresh issues, with no offer-for-sale (OFS) component.

The companies had filed their preliminary IPO papers with SEBI between April and September, and received the regulator's observations during 15-19 December, the update showed.

Dhariwal Buildtech's maiden public offering will consist of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 950 crore, as per its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP).

Of the total proceeds, Rs 300 crore will be used to repay debt, Rs 203 crore for the purchase of construction equipment, and Rs 174.2 crore for repayment or prepayment of outstanding borrowings, with the balance earmarked for general corporate purposes.

PRISM SECURES NOD FOR RS 6,650 CR IPO

OYO's parent firm PRISM has received shareholders' approval to raise up to Rs 6,650 crore through a fresh issue of equity shares as part of its proposed Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The travel tech platform's shareholders greenbottle the proposal at an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) held on 20 December, 2025. *—PTI*

Capex is key as FY27 budget targets growth: EY Report

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

- Capital spending rose 32.4 per cent during April-October FY26, even as revenue expenditure was tightly contained.

As the government gears up to present the Union Budget for financial year 2027 (FY27), India enters the season on a strong footing, with a focus on growth through capital expenditure (capex) and deficit reduction, EY say.

Real GDP grew 8.2 per cent in Q2 FY26, driven by balanced expansion in manufacturing and services. Capital spending rose 32.4 per cent during April-October FY26, even as revenue expenditure was tightly contained.

Sustaining 15-20 per cent annual growth in capex will be critical for maintaining medium-term GDP growth of 6.5 percent or higher, particularly amid global trade uncertainties.

Notably, India' s total expenditure grew by 6.1 per cent during April-October FY26, with a growth in revenue expenditure at 0.03 per cent and that in capital expenditure at 32.4 per cent.

EY in its Economy Watch report predict the government to adhere to the FY26 fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP, helped by strong non-tax revenues, expenditure restraint, and recent revenue-enhancing measures such as higher excise duties on tobacco and new cesses. *—PTI*

Cholamandalam denies allegations, shares rally by 8%

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company (CIFCL), part of the Murugappa Group, has dismissed allegations of corporate misgovernance as "malicious and baseless". The allegations, made by Cobrapost, claimed to have identified transactions exceeding Rs 10,000 crore involving CIFCL and related entities.

In a regulatory filing, CIFCL asserted that the claims were aimed at causing reputational harm, reiterating its solid performance amid these assertions.

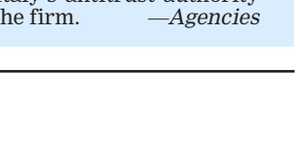
The company's net worth stood at Rs 26,783 crore as of 30 November, 2025, reflecting an increase of over Rs 3,000 crore from previous figures.

Following the clarification, shares of Cholamandalam surged by 8 per cent, trading at Rs 1,689 after hitting a high of Rs 1,713.40.

The stock opened at Rs 1,605, against the previous close of Rs 1,584.90. The firm's market cap reached Rs 1.42 lakh crore.

CIFCL affirmed that its financial performance, asset quality, and liquidity remain robust, with no changes to its previously issued guidance, emphasising compliance with legal and regulatory standards.

The company remains committed to transparent communication with investors and stakeholders. *—Agencies*



APPLE HAS APPEALED

Italy antitrust agency fines Apple $116M over privacy

ROME, 23 DEC

Italy's antitrust authority fined Apple 98.6 million euros ($116 million) on Monday after determining that operating one of its privacy features restricted App Store competition. Apple said it would appeal the sanction.

Apple abused its dominant position with its App Tracking Transparency (ATT) policy, which forces apps to obtain permission before collecting data to target users with personalised ads, the antitrust authority said in a statement.

The company rolled out ATT starting in April 2021 as part of an update to the operating system powering the iPhone and iPad.

While the feature was designed to tighten up privacy, it faced criticism from Big Tech rivals that it would make it harder for smaller apps to survive without charging consumers.

The authority didn't criticise the policy per se, but the fact that the Apple system requires third-party app makers to ask users for consent twice in order to comply with Europe's strict privacy rules.

"As a result, such double consent requirement is harmful to developers, whose business model relies on the sale of advertising space, as well as to advertisers and advertising intermediation platforms," the authority said.

The authority said that the double consent required was "disproportionate" to the stated goal of data protection.

The Cupertino, Calif-based company said it strongly disagreed with the finding and would appeal it, saying it disregarded the privacy protections of the policy "in favor of ad tech companies and data brokers who want unfettered access to users' personal data."

- Apple abused its dominant position with its ATT policy, which forces apps to obtain permission before collecting data to target users with personalised ads, the antitrust authority said in a statement.

"At Apple, we believe privacy is a fundamental human right, and we created App Tracking Transparency to give users a simple way to control whether companies can track their activity across other apps and websites," Apple said in a statement.

"These rules apply equally to all developers, including Apple, and have been embraced by our customers and praised by privacy advocates and data protection authorities around the world." The Italy antitrust finding is similar to one by the French antitrust watchdog, which in March fined Apple 150 million euros ($162 million) over the consent feature.

Meanwhile, Apple on Tuesday annouced that it will appeal the sanctions imposed by Italy's antitrust authority on the firm. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

AITA drops Sriram Balaji from Davis Cup

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The AITA selection committee on Tuesday dropped N Sriram Balaji for the upcoming Davis Cup against the Netherlands, but other selections were on expected lines. The first round Qualifiers tie will be played in Bengaluru on February 7 and 8. India's singles challenge will be led by Sumit Nagal, while the squad also features doubles specialist Yuki Bhambri, along with Dhakshineswar Suresh and Karan Singh. Experienced doubles player Balaji has been left out of the squad, with the selection committee opting to look ahead as part of a longer-term plan. Explaining the decision, India captain Rohit Rajpal said the selectors wanted to invest in younger options. —*PTI*

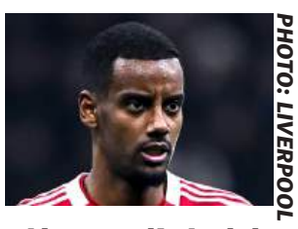


PHOTO: LIVERPOOL

Liverpool's Isak is sidelined for two months

LIVERPOOL, 23 DEC

Liverpool striker Alexander Isak will be laid up for two months with a broken ankle and fibula from a tackle that coach Arne Slot described as reckless on Tuesday. Isak had surgery on Monday, two days after he was injured in the act of scoring the opening goal of a 2-1 win over Tottenham in the Premier League. "It's going to be a long injury, for a couple of months," Slot said. "It's a big disappointment for him and, as a result, for us. "This was, for me, a reckless challenge. I've said a lot about the tackle of Xavi Simons (who was sent off for dragging his studs down the calf of Virgil van Dijk in the same game), which, for me, was completely unintentional."I don't think you will ever get an injury out of a tackle like that. —*PTI*

Deepti becomes No.1 T20I bowler in ICC rankings

DUBAI, 23 DEC

Star India all-rounder Deepti Sharma on Tuesday rose to the top of the ICC women's T20I bowling rankings for the first time in her career. The 28-year-old's haul of 1 for 20 in the opening T20I of their home series against Sri Lanka in Visakhapatnam was enough for the off-spinner to overtake Australia fast bowler Annabel Sutherland, pipping her by one rating point to sit at the top of the table with 737 points. Pacer Arundhati Reddy has climbed up five places to be 36th, while spinner Shree Charani is up 19 places to 69th.—*PTI*

ICC announces partnership with Hyundai

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The ICC has today announced a major multi-year global partnership with Hyundai Motor Company, welcoming the global automotive manufacturer as a Premier Partner for upcoming ICC events. The partnership was officially unveiled at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, with ICC Chairman Jay Shah, ICC Chief Executive Officer Sanjog Gupta, and Hyundai India Managing Director and CEO designate Mr Tarun Garg present. Hyundai becomes one of only four Premier Partners within the ICC's top-tier commercial partnerships programme, completing the category ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, which will be hosted by India and Sri Lanka from 7 February as a Premier Partner.—*PTI*

India are strong title contender in 2026 Hockey WC: Doren

File image of India Hockey Team PHOTO: PTI

BRUSSELS, 23 DEC

Belgium defender Arthur Van Doren says on Tuesday India is a strong title contender in next year's men's hockey World Cup, saying it is "impossible to ignore" the Men in Blue for their consistency over the last few years.

India's performance at major tournaments, including successive Olympic medals, has firmly established it among the elite.

"It's impossible not to consider them as big contenders," Van Doren told PTI Videos."They've shown results for a long time now, with two Olympic cycles where they ended up medallists.

Ignoring India when talking about the World Cup would not be fair anymore." The Belgian stalwart, who has close to 300 international caps, praised the balance in the Indian team."They've got quality in pretty much every line.

They've got a good coach, quality experience figures, and quality youth," he said, adding that the team's overall structure now allows them to compete consistently with the best.

Van Doren noted that India's resurgence has not happened overnight, but is the result of sustained planning and an exposure system."What you see now is not a coincidence. They've been building for years, and the results are showing." However, he also pointed out that the race for the World Cup title is expected to be extremely tight."The only problem teams like India, Belgium face is that there are five or six or seven more teams that are just as confident as we are," he said.

"That's the beauty of international hockey at this moment it's very close at the top." Van Doren also had high praise for Indian players' technical ability, especially the younger generation coming through the ranks. —*PTI*

Vijay Hazare: Kohli, Rohit, Gill to play 1-Day C'ship

Virat Kohli is playing in this tournament after 15 years

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

The stands, which were until recently covered with a thick growth of bushes, were being cleaned up hurriedly. The ad-hoc committee members of the Rajasthan Cricket Association could be seen rushing to help set up a quick felicitation programme, which eventually didn't materialise. And, of course, die-hard cricket fans waited patiently for hours. It felt like a festival at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium on Tuesday.

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are participating in the Vijay Hazare One-Day Trophy, marking a significant return to domestic cricket for them

Following the BCCI's mandate, Rohit will be featuring in the first two fixtures of the Vijay Hazare Trophy for Mumbai, beginning with the outing against Sikkim on Wednesday, and even though on paper, it may appear to be an uneven contest, Rohit sweated it out in the nets for nearly a couple of hours before inspecting the pitch, which looked flat. But in the case of **Kohli, who is playing in this tournament after 15 years**, and Rohit, it is a sharp reminder that they are no longer immune to the evolving power equations within Indian cricket.

The celebrated pair remain the biggest current stars of the game, but that status can't mask the reality that both cricket and time have entered the freeway.

They are now the Beatles, looking for chart space in the age of Beach Bunny. But watching that gradual unfolding of struggle itself is fascinating.

Rohit has made it clear that he will play the first two matches of Mumbai against Sikkim and Uttarakhand in Jaipur on 24 and 26 December.

Delhi will open their Elite Group D campaign against Andhra in Bengaluru at the BCCI Centre of Excellence (CoE) after the Karnataka government denied permission to hold matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, citing security reasons, following which they will face Gujarat.

Both Kohli and Rohit still have the power to choose their games, but what they don't seem to have is the power to choose their destiny.

An underwhelming outing in the Vijay Hazare Trophy will not have a say in their selection for the ODIs against New Zealand next month, but more than anyone else, Kohli and Rohit would also know that the space around them is shrinking. —*PTI*

'PROVOCATIVE BEHAVIOUR'

Pak to complain against India U19 players with ICC

KARACHI, 23 DEC

Accusing the Indian players of provocative behaviour during the Under-19 Asia Cup final, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has said that he intends to "formally inform" the ICC about it.

Pakistan defeated India by 191 runs in the final of the age-group continental showpiece in Dubai on Sunday.

Players from both sides were seen engaged in verbal altercations during the game, and the two teams also did not exchange the customary handshakes before and after the match.

"Indian players kept provoking Pakistani players during the Under-19 Asia Cup final," Naqvi said at a reception hosted by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

"Pakistan will formally inform the ICC about the incident. Politics and sports should always be kept separate," he added.

"The behaviour and attitude of the Indian players were not good and improper," he alleged.

Even if Pakistan were to file a formal complaint, the ICC would go only by the report filed by the match referee.

India-Pakistan diplomatic ties have nosedived after the Pahalgam terror attack in April earlier this year, in which 26 tourists were gunned down by terrorists. The Indian government has banned all bilateral sports engagement with Pakistan but has exempted multi-nation competitions, citing the Olympic Charter that prohibits discrimination on political grounds. —*PTI*

NEW RECORD IN T20I

Indonesia's Gede claims five wickets in an over

BALI, 23 DEC

Indonesia's right-arm pacer Gede Priandana on Tuesday created the record of claiming five wickets inside one over of a T20 International contest, a feat registered during his team's 60-run win over Cambodia here.

In a solitary over bowled during the first T20I of the eight-match series, Priandana returned an astonishing 1-0-1-5 while coming onto bowl as the seventh bowler for his side.

Priandana had earlier scored six while opening for Indonesia, who put on 167 for five in the first of the two T20Is.

In reply, Cambodia were bowled out for 107 in 16 overs here at the Udayana Cricket Ground.

Cambodia were afloat at 105 for six after 15 overs, but the contest came to a swift end when the 28-year-old Priandana registered a hat-trick, dismissing Shah Abrar Hussain (37), Nirmaljit Singh (0), and Chanthoeun Rathanak (0) on the first three balls.

While the legitimate fourth ball was a dot following a wide, Priandana dismissed Mongdara Sok (0) and Pel Vannak (0) on the last two deliveries to record his feat.

Overall, a five-wicket over has been recorded twice in men's T20s, reported ESPNCricinfo. Playing for UCB-BCB XI, Al-Amin Hossain took five wickets in an over in the Victory Day T20 Cup in 2013-14, whereas former India player Abhimanyu Mithun claimed five wickets in one over for Karnataka against Haryana in the final of the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy in 2019-20. —*PTI*

Jemimah Rodrigues appointed Delhi Capitals captain

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

Delhi Capitals on Tuesday appointed India batter Jemimah Rodrigues as captain ahead of the 2026 Women's Premier League season.

The 25-year-old recently played a key role in India's ICC Women's World Cup triumph, scoring a scintillating unbeaten 127 in a record chase of 339 against Australia in the semi-final.

"It is an absolute honour to be named captain of the Delhi Capitals, and I am deeply grateful to the owners and the support staff for placing their faith in me to lead this team," Rodrigues said in a release. "It has truly been a dream year for my family, winning the World Cup and now being entrusted with this wonderful opportunity at a franchise that has held a very special place in my heart since the very first season of the WPL," she added. —*PTI*

PM MEETS JAVELIN LEGEND

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Olympic gold medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and his wife Himani Mor PHOTO: PTI

Ramita, Himanshu Dhillon win 10m air rifle mixed team gold

BHOPAL, 23 DEC

Ramita Jindal and Himanshu Dhillon from Haryana clinched the 10m air rifle mixed team gold with a 16-12 victory over the Maharashtra pair of Arya Borse and Parth Mane, at the National Shooting Championship here on Tuesday.

The triumph extended a dominating run for Dhillon, who had set a national as well as junior record of 634.5 in the men's 10m air rifle event on Monday. Delhi's Rajshree Sancheti and Paarth Makhija

settled for the bronze medal, holding on to their nerves to win 17-15 against the Madhya Pradesh pairing of Shreya Agarwal and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar.

In the same event at the junior level, West Bengal's Sandratta Roy and Abhinav Shaw defeated Tamil Nadu's Maneshika Tarun Senthil and Shaktivel Senthil 16–8 in the final.

Karnataka's Hrudya Shri Kondur and Naraen Pranav claimed the bronze medal with a compelling 17-9 win over Nishitha Bommidi and Ummahesh Maddineni from Andhra Pradesh.

Maharashtra's Isha Anil Taksale and Pritam Kendre edged past Tamil Nadu's Maneshika Tarun Senthil and Shaktivel Senthil 16-14 to win the gold medal in the youth category. —*PTI*

DURING ASHES TOUR

England cricketers under scanner for drinking

MELBOURNE, 23 DEC

England's managing director of men's cricket, Rob Key, says he will investigate the drinking habits of the England team following reports that their mid-Ashes beach resort break may have involved over-indulging in alcohol.

England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to retain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action.

The England squad visited the resort town of Noosa on the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane between the second and third tests, a long-planned part of the itinerary designed to help players relax and unwind on the long tour.

England cricketers reportedly enjoying a drink during Ashes tour; team MD Rob Key PHOTO: PTI

Key, who did not join the players in Noosa, said he had no problem with the break, but would not be happy if he found evidence of over-indulging.

"If there are things where people are saying that our players went out and drank excessively, then of course we'll be looking into that," he said Tuesday in Melbourne, where the fourth test begins Friday.

"Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol for an international cricket team is not something that I'd expect to see at any stage, and it would be a fault not to look into what happened there. From everything that I've heard so far, they actually were pretty well behaved. Very well behaved."

He added: "We've got enough ways of finding out exactly what happened and everything that I've heard so far that they sat down, had lunch, had dinner, didn't go out late, all of that, had the odd drink. —*PTI*

Is Pat Cummins doubtful about T20 World Cup?

MELBOURNE, 23 DEC

Australia skipper Pat Cummins' chances of playing at next year's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka are "quite grey at the moment" as he battles a back stress issue that has affected his participation in the ongoing Ashes series against England. Cummins returned to play the third Ashes Test in Adelaide after missing the opening two matches, picking up six wickets to help Australia clinch the series 3-0. However, the Australian Test and ODI skipper will take no further part in the series, and even his participation at the T20 World Cup is also uncertain.

All-rounder Mitchell is Australia's T20I captain."-Looking forward to the World Cup, whether he will be there or not, I can't really say. It's quite grey at the moment. We're hopeful," head coach Andrew McDonald was quoted as saying by 'ESPNCricinfo'. —*PTI*

Australia skipper Pat Cummins PHOTO: PTI